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CLEOPATRA'S DAUGHTER

ROMANCE

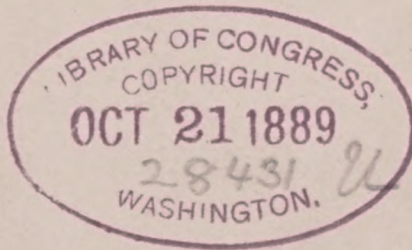
OF

A BRANCH OF ROSES

BY

William Armstrong

AUTHOR OF "THEKLA: A STORY OF VIENNESE MUSICAL LIFE"



BOSTON
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CLEOPATRA'S DAUGHTER



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CHAPTER I.

THE old Count de Tocqueville was yawning surreptitiously and making himself generally *blasé*, in a comfortable manner, in a comfortable *fauteuil* in his niece's box at the Court Theatre of Stuttgart, while the orchestra blared the noisy *entr'acte* music to the *finale* of a version of Göthe's "Götz," which, as he had just declared to his niece, the Countess Zàpròny, had been written with the sole visible intent and purpose of so many productions in his own language, that of making one half the world behave ill, in order that the other half might learn to behave well; being about to add that so large a quota failed to apply the proffered example, when he observed that she was not paying the slightest attention to his remarks, and languidly proceeded to turn a small degree of curiosity and a monocle on the *pension* Krüger-Schmidt, that blossomed and bobbed in the *Frem-*

den Loge, where it improved its mind, or rather the instinct supplying that function, by becoming intensely interested, not in the play, as had been pecuniarily presupposed, but the double row of officers in the parterre, who deliberately surveyed their charms, together with those of the remainder of the house, in one comprehensive and stoical stare of military dignity.

The bass drum, which, after the manner of bass drums in *entr'acte* music, had been working itself slowly but successfully into a state of musical epilepsy, prevented either occupant of the Zàpròny box from noticing the entrance of two gentlemen, who stood for a moment in the shadow of the portière. Then the elder, a tall, white-haired man of military bearing, advanced and extended his hand, with an amused twinkle of expectancy in his dark blue eyes, to the Countess, who recovered that animation just now so incontinently lacking, recalling de Tocqueville from the Krüger-Schmidt *pension* and dismal broodings, by the delighted tone of her welcome.

“Ah! Prince Waldemar, can I believe my eyes? Where have you dropped from?”

“Just in by the Paris express, madame, and being told at your *palais* that you were at the theatre, drove here, *très prompt*, to find you looking more charming than ever.”

“A compliment, actually a compliment, the first in, let me see — two weeks? Yes; Zàpròny left for Pesth two weeks ago, and the court has been at San Remo about as long, leaving me to vegetate with my devoted uncle.

“And *ennui*,” put in de Tocqueville drily: “I assure you I have undergone all the complimentary snubbings of a fond husband or an aged relative, and am speechlessly enraptured to have a sharer of my bliss.”

“Two,” responded Prince Waldemar smilingly.

“My nephew and namesake, Waldemar Daggerhof, who, you remember, was engaged in *mitrail-leuse* diplomacy with the Turks when last you visited me at Petershof.”

The young Russian advanced, and in response to a gesture of the Countess, seated himself in the *fautueil* next her, replying with ready promptitude to her animated questionings regarding Paris society and the Salon's latest picture. But he thought her infinitely more charming than any pictured grace he could recall, as she sat there framed in the dingy box of the old Court Theatre. The tawny red gold of her hair gathered back from a face that glowed with the faint pink of a sea shell, a face lit up by eyes the hue of a topaz, glinting and shadowing with every change of emotion, now shining with the veiled light of a tigress's heavy

with slumber, now deepening to the flickering shadow of a passing cloudlet upon a field of amber grain; a robe of light blue, misty with old lace, lent its soft folds to the full graceful lines of her figure; while the hand, daintily gloved in *gants de Suède*, that wielded a large Spanish fan, grasped at one moment the frail sticks with a nervous energy which threatened to snap them, and the next toyed with them gently, languorously, sending little whiffs of faintly perfumed air to where Waldemar Daggerhof sat in the shadow.

Presently the curtain rose, and she turned her full attention to the stage, for Wolter, that greatest of tragediennes, played as *gast* the rôle of Adelaide, and in the *finale* wrought one of those whirlwinds of passion and despair which awaken all the emotions of the human heart, running the gamut from shrill notes of joy through mellow bliss to deepest agony. Once a fragment of conversation, which was carried on unceasingly by the Prince and de Tocqueville, came floating out between the lines: "I wonder that you rest content in this dull German town. You are changed. It cannot be that you are growing old. You are younger than I, and I — why, I feel myself in the prime of life. Maybe you are in love?" and the septuagenarian looked at the sexagenarian out of the corner of his eye, with a glance described in young people as roguish, in old ones leering.

“Why, my dear fellow, I grow younger, positively younger every day. Do you know” — here a breach was supplemented by a gurgle, which with *bon vivants* is apt to take the stead of genuine, but possibly less enjoyable, laughter — and then: “but nevertheless I am going to Africa. Yes, Africa. It will take me longer to get there, and consequently longer to get back than any place I can think of at present; and as being *en voyage* seems to be the principal good to be got out of travelling nowadays, I shall have a surfeit.”

When de Tocqueville had spoken of his departure for Africa, Waldemar saw the Countess start a little and bend her fan tightly until the mother-of-pearl sticks snapped; then she sank back listlessly, returning her absorbed attention to the stage, no ruffle marring the placidity of her countenance; only her hands, which he had already learned as being more expressive of emotion than any feature but her eyes, still held the fan in tenacity of grasp. How could the absence or presence of this wretched old worldling either affect or disturb her, he wondered. But idle surmise was quickly merged in intensity of interest that the scene upon the stage held for him. Adelaide, through her vile intrigue, having wrought the murder of her husband, is about to receive her dreadful retribution from the avenging band of the secret

tribunal. Already at the portcullis is heard their quivering axe strokes. Her retainers flee in affright, hurling in blind terror from the lanced windows of the castle, to escape a fate feared as more relentless than jagged rocks and stifling waters of the moat. She laughs, then shrieks, and laughs again, as they creep slowly, slowly upon her. Deserted — alone — she feels herself woven in the net of a gigantic spider that nearer and nearer enfolds her in its choking, suffocating meshes, forbidding all hope of succor. For a brief flash of overwrought suspense no sound breaks the stillness but her chill, maniacal laughter, which grows, each peal, more ghastly and terrifying. The sweat of horror stands upon her brow, and lips that are frozen into rigidity by dread of an approaching doom refuse to frame themselves to utterance. Her eyes fixed, starting, with agony are set upon a vision palpable only to her blood-stained sight. A rope hurls through the air from the scarlet portière'd way back of her, thrown by the masked avengers. Dragged backwards, backwards, shrieking, shivering, fainter and fainter, — a long, convulsive shudder, and death is kinder to her than life, for she can no longer think — and suffer.

When the curtain fell, Waldemar turned away sighing, and with a start caught up again the threads of reality and life. Already de Tocqueville

was placing the Countess's *sortie de bal* about her shoulders with elaborate attention. He saw her face bent full upon the old man; her eyes had grown almost black, and wore a look of terrified beseeching akin to agony. Her fan lay crushed upon the floor at his feet. He stooped to pick it up, and, in rising, heard her say, "You must not go to Africa," distinctly and with a tone of half-command, half-pleading entreaty, that evidently found poor vent in the brief words conventionality granted utterance. In a moment she had regained her usual mien, and they were gaily chatting under the *porte-cochère* next the palace while waiting for her carriage. The snow was falling thickly; already a goodly covering decked the *allée* leading by the trellised palace gardens towards the *Anlagen*, while the great hollow square of the courtyard glimmered and paled through the eddying swirl of the snow flakes that danced, a wild company of ghosts, upon an ashen floor.

"A snow! A snow!" cried the Countess gaily. "To think of a heavy snow in Stuttgart, and that, too, on the eve of Christmas Day which sees Zàpròny home. We can drive in sledges to our supper party at Regolstein to-morrow night. You must join us; the horses shall be spanned troïka fashion, three abreast, and we will muffle up in furs, and race, and chase, and fly as if we were on the

steppes and the wolves were after us. You shall not deny me, Prince. You and your nephew must both be of the party."

"Far be it from me, Madame la Comtesse, to deny anything to a beautiful woman," said the old chevalier, in a tone blending equal tinge of fatherly pride, by right of years, and flattered vanity at the complimentary eagerness evinced,—a phase of flattery which no man ever grows too old or too decrepit to appreciate from the lips of a woman, if she is beautiful, and does not happen to be his wife.

Amid gay good nights and Christmas greetings the carriage disappeared in a whirl of snow flakes; and arm in arm the two men, with furs tightly muffled, leisurely passed along the Schloss Platz towards Hotel Marquardt. The old castle across the square loomed up grave and dignified, betokening a repose that centuries alone can bring. Gleaming lights from out its quaint windows, set deep beneath a vast hood of snow-capped roof, presenting, through a shifting, vacillating haze, an *ensemble* strongly remindful of a huge and stately owl resting calmly serene amid a vast foam of billowy waves. The twisted, interlacing skeletons of Virginia creeper festooned from tree to tree along the Platz swung burden of strange blossoming, while pine trees, faintly blackened, told the watch-

ful presence of King Wilhelm's monument, which made itself felt, rather than seen,— a faint, vapory column bearing aloft a brazen angel into the leaden air.

Low and sepulchral, the Königsbau stretched its vast colonnade to circling wreaths of snow flowers that twined in and out in playful masses, only to fall and rest a broad embankment upon the great flight of granite stairs beneath. Over all, above, below, a writhing, twisting, cloud-wrought serpent, coiling noiselessly, steadily downward without ceasing, giving fair promise of a world to-morrow blossoming forth in Christmas bravery.

But to these Russians, accustomed to the gusts and waves of sleet which swept down the Newsky Prospekt like a cloud of scimitars, or the angry clash of Black Sea tempests dashing about the Golden Hag, a band of furies bent on death and desolation, this South German snow flurry seemed a very poor attempt of Nature, rather to be condoned and treated with a kindly indifference, knowing that, for the climate, she had done her best.

Yielding his furs to a footman, Waldemar entered his uncle's salon, and lifting the *chartreuse* *flacon* from a *liqueur* stand, to which the Prince had waived an invitation, dashed off a glass, and, sinking into the depths of a luxurious chair, stretched

his long, muscular limbs towards the glowing grate, leisurely twisting cigarettes of Turkish *tabac*, to watch their smoke, presently, in a long-sustained silence, as it curled and fainted away in the shadows of the high-ceiled room.

“Uncle Daggerhof, tell me the history of the Countess Zàpròny.” The Prince started, frowning slightly, aroused from a line of thought apparently more pleasant than reminiscence of the lady in question.

“*Hein*, boy! A beautiful woman should have no history. Her past holds her peccadillos, her future, age ; both of which we should help her to forget, that we may enjoy the sunshine of her present. When I was young, we thought too much of the living moment to link it with the dead.”

“You forget, *mon* Prince, that in this cycle we show our interest by vivisection, and try to prove that all the beauties held by that we worship owe their brilliancy, like the planets, to reflected light, — light cast by our own imagination.”

“Zounds ! what are you driving at ? One would think me the youth instead of you. This much I do know, and am thankful for, *my* inspirations and ideas were formed in an epoch when life — living, breathing, passionate life — flowed like an electric current through other lives, to bring to us the sweet, tingling sensation of being. We were

not one and complete, around whom all things swung, like moons about a planet, but butterflies, fluttering in a garden, caring not for the name of the flower that suckled us, but only for the honey which it yielded."

"Maybe, as we live quicker, faster, at a wilder pace, we must live in the concrete, not the abstract. Every moment must be made to tell, and not looked back upon as yielding naught in actuality."

"Then you will find in the end that all has been in vain. Ignorant ignorance is unimpaired sense of enjoyment. Cherish that which comes, avoiding analyzation, questionings. I have lived long, ay, longer than my years ; but not yet long enough to question that which brought me joy," added the old man scornfully, with sparkling eyes ; and a slight flush fainted in his cheek as he twirled the *vodki* glass in his long, slender fingers.

For some moments he regarded silently the handsome, youthful face across the table, its dark beauty relieved of all Muscovite heaviness by flashing eyes, the heritage of an Alsatian mother, who, perhaps, had tempered in his blood the Russian fire with Rhenish phlegm. His brow was contracted, and a play of half-annoyed disappointment fluttered about his lips as he puffed and puffed again, watching the cloud-wreaths thicken.

Directly, feeling the gaze of his uncle, he turned upon him, his features relaxing in a winning smile that lit up every lineament with a suddenness which lent transfiguration.

The Prince's face softened, a look of affectionate pride crept into his eyes.

"*Hein*, boy! I believe you are disappointed at not hearing the history of Madame la Comtesse. Youth has now an odd way of evincing interest. It does not rave, but question. *N'importe*, you shall have her story. But fill up your glass, that you may see, with your nineteenth century eyes, the glamour that envelops her in an old man's brain.

"Cleopatra Varasov, the mother of Natalie Zàpròny, was one of the most beautiful women at the court of Nikolas, called in foreign literature 'The Cruel.' She came as lady-in-waiting with the Grand-duchess Olga, when crowned by Württemberg her Queen. The little court had grace then. France had not yet grown ungenteel in the rabidness of her republicanism, nor Russia been inveigled and diplomatized away by poverty conscienceless, thieving Prussia, who, now left alone, guards her with wary talons, hungry, but not ready to assimilate. A widely different court was it then to now, when poor Queen Olga, with all her gentle grace, cannot prevent the horde of

boorish German bumpkins from engulfing her with their gutturals and cabbages.

“Probably the less said of Cleopatra Varasov the better. Society forgave her much, for she was very beautiful, and witty too, so that those who hated her face feared her tongue, and armistice was held. Napoleons, from First to Third, took deepest interest in this little kingdom, which they founded, and were ever accused of wanting to steal by the high-minded Teutons of the north, who themselves longed to purloin her.

“On one of the many diplomatic missions undertaken from first to last to maintain the neutrality of the state, and prevent absorption by Prussia, came the young de Tocqueville, nephew of him you met to-night. Handsome, graceful, already a diplomat of trusted *finesse*, it was small wonder that Natalie Varasov lost her heart to him. The mother, proving herself a still more wily strategist than the ambassador, trapped him as son-in-law, thus ridding herself of two considerable burdens — a pretty, portionless daughter and the surveillance of a pair of youthful eyes. The court of France was then the gayest of all Europe; some said the most wicked. But then there is such widely different opinion, that the heaven of one class will ever be the hell of another; and I myself hold that, when my bones are laid genteelly away in the

Daggerhof mausoleum, I shall feel amply satisfied if, in spirit, I can be translated to a second court of Eugénie. Ah! *nous verrons*, only at my age one should expect nothing. Well, cut adrift in this gay world, so largely, strangely new, with a past none too healthful in its school, Natalie de Tocqueville preserved the purity and grace of some sweet flower, and bloomed but in the sunshine of her husband's smile.

For a time he responded to her affection, then the gay cosmopolite asserted dominance, and he treated her at first slightly, then with open coldness and neglect, finally, gossip said, with cruelty. This much I do know, through all her trials and griefs she held her own counsel and dignity with the heroism of a Spartan, or a true-hearted woman, and was ever an affectionate, devoted, and forgiving wife to as great a scamp as ever lived. *Ciel*, being myself a good man,—late in life, I mean,—I am properly thankful that I evaded matrimony, for I have ever observed that it is a lottery in which the blanks draw the prizes.

“The deepest cloud upon poor Natalie's horizon was a certain Princess de Saignon, herself one of the old noblesse. Wedded to the descendant of a creature of Napoleon the First, the culmination achieved which might have been easily prophesied. He was a vulgar, rough fellow, with but one

passion and that for gold. She was a black-eyed, white-faced little woman, without a character of either hue, until de Tocqueville set the color — which you may imagine.

“De Saignon looked on quite calmly ; saw bad go to worse, and seemed to thrive. Madame dressed and jewelled more superbly oftentimes than the Empress herself, while Monsieur revelled in a riotous *ménage* to which he was a stranger.

“The circle of knowing ones widened, until, at last, even Natalie must have been apprised. Whether the Empress would have quietly forbade de Saignon coming to court and stopped the scandal, or looked on in indifference, as she not unfrequently did, I know not. But at any rate, before she had decided, through some unforeseen power,—I have heard it was a scornful scene between the Countess de Tocqueville and the dog de Saignon,—he rescued what remnant of manhood remained to him, and challenged de Tocqueville, who was mortally wounded by a sabre stroke which cleft his skull.

“Notwithstanding his behavior in the past, Madame his wife, when he was brought home to their *hotel*, nursed him day and night,—some said more from remorse at having hastened the *finale*, than devotion. But it seems to me that a deal of both would have been necessary to work such fortitude.

“De Tocqueville lay for weeks in a fever. Then, growing slowly better, was taken to the south of France, accompanied by Madame and the only living relative on either side of their unfortunate house, Count de Tocqueville, who never since has left her, and who evinces a devotion and constancy which he has failed to emulate towards any other human creature.

“Young de Tocqueville must have lingered some months, dying slowly. But the war cloud engulfed all so blackly, that I kept faint trace of their progression, hearing, finally, that he had died at a retired village in the north of Spain, and was quietly buried there instead of in the family mausoleum.

“Only a remnant of fortune remained to his widow, Madame de Saignon having been quite a patron saint of society, and Natalie, after some wandering, came back to the town that she had left seven years before, — twenty-five, a widow, and only the richer in experience, of a not altogether agreeable nature, than she was on her departure.

“The Queen, not forgetful of her mother and their old friendship, showed her many kindnesses, and at last Madame de Tocqueville appeared at court, winning all hearts by her charming beauty and distinguished manners. She met Zàpròny there when he was wandering about Europe on some errand or other for Milan or Servia, who was

having a not very Olympian time, shortly after the assassination of his brother Michael and his own troublous accession.

“But the strange thing about it all is, that de Tocqueville and Zàpròny are so strikingly alike in appearance, carriage, and bearing, that even I, who always expect what I cannot possibly experience, by reason of prudential motives, almost had the breath knocked out of me from pure surprise, nay, I may say truthfully, affright, at sight of a mortal so singularly allied in looks to one I entertained the greatest pleasure in knowing no longer gifted with that doubtful blessing.”

“Did she evince no repugnance, no feeling, at this wonderful resemblance to one so singularly remindful of a ruined past and broken heart?”

“No; that is the remarkable point in her case. From the first, I hear, she seemed magnetized, fascinated by Zàpròny, who, fortunately, possesses all the good qualities which his predecessor in her affections so singularly lacked. She may have known this intuitively, or been densely ignorant; I cannot pretend to understand. I only know that she is a very charming woman, and that, after all, you may regret your curiosity because of my garrulity.”

“No, I am only the more curious than before. Here asserts itself my nineteenth century vivi-

section. Is she not changed, and how? hardened or softened in the crucible through which the fates have dragged her?"

"Of that I know nothing, neither do I care. She is a charming woman, as I have said, and that is enough, or ought to be, for any man. Women, like metaphysics, are best undisturbed. We are apt to return to the point that we left in our researches, with the additional dissatisfaction of not being pleased with what we have, because we fear we haven't it."

Prince Daggerhof's reasonings might have satisfied himself, but Waldemar would have deemed him an exceptional philosopher had such been the case.

Was the Countess relentless, cruel, as those tawny eyes and nervous, clutching fingers shadowed, or dreamy, loving, as the languorous, flitting smile that played about two red and perfect lips?

What was there between the old Count and herself begetting fear and power, which held him near her still, when all that man's devotion could inspire was hers? What could that *blasè* Frenchman have in common with a niece-at-law, the one-time widow of a husband whose name and love had brought her but a broken heart and desolation?

It could hardly matter whether he rushed off to

Africa or the Antipodes. Was not the strong arm of Zàpròny might enough to keep all harm at bay ?

But the longer he pondered, the longer became the list of his queries, until at last the snow flakes ceased from falling, and the moonlight flooded all the Platz.



CHAPTER II.

FRAU Baronin von Pappenheim-Waggenheim seated herself in her salon with a sigh and an air of satisfaction. Not a speck of dust marred the glossy surface of the table squarely placed before the sofa which constituted her enthronement, or crept into faintest relief where the Christmas sunshine lay in patches on the parquet floor ; while the pictures that hung crosswise in the four corners of the room, and which might have been worshipped with impunity as representing nothing in heaven above, nor the earth beneath, neither the waters under the earth, glistened and blinked as if just freshly varnished.

The business of getting rid of Christmas gifts, procured for children and servants, had been dutifully gone through with the night before. Likewise the danger averted of Marie putting too much coffee and too little chicory in the *Weihnachtsfrühstück*, so that absolutely nothing remained to demand her attention until the dinner summons.

Frau Baronin had sent her three youngest

daughters, together with their governess, to the English chapel, more as a matter of intellectual, than religious propagation. For her friend and dreaded oracle, the Count de Tocqueville, a much-feared, satirical, but admired authority, had declared in her hearing, with frequent repetition, that the only English cosmopolite was William Shakespeare, and he had never left his island; forcing thus upon her comprehension, by gradual process, the conclusive deduction that a class retaining so rigidly the manners and customs of their ancestors might be well studied, like other curiosities of natural history, where they were wont to congregate in large numbers. And to this purpose she often sent her family for amusement, and possible enlargement of vision, to St. Catherine's in the Olga Strasse.

The two eldest von Pappenheim-Waggenheims were still in bed, by maternal mandate. They were, both of them, strong, healthy girls, with very red cheeks, silky, yellow hair, and a strong inclination to what their mother called "*emponge-bonge*." Being, indeed, quite equal, constitutionally, to the effort undertaken by their juvenile relatives, whom, had the smallest consideration been shown their individual tastes, they would most gladly have accompanied in pursuit of anthropology; but possessing a fatal tendency to fall asleep at the

preposterous hour of nine, which de Tocqueville emphatically declared the early afternoon, they had been ordered in bed to become glutted with sleep, that by no possible mischance they might happen to grow unconscious, from lack of brain rest, at a supper party to which they had been bidden for that evening by the Countess Zàpròny.

In years past, Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim had proved herself a loyal friend to Cleopatra Varasov, although not by any means intellectually her equal, affording, in the early and indeed most stages of their acquaintance, more amusement than companionship.

La belle Russe had been touched, and perhaps rendered momentarily less cynical because of the woman's simple, confiding faithfulness, which she was wont in other, and, after her own reckoning, clearer moments, to classify as the instinctive attachment of animals to intelligent beings. But she nevertheless rewarded her, in a fashion, by not flirting with the Baron.

Whatever Cleopatra Varasov's opinion might have been regarding the Baroness's intellectual status, Natalie remembered, quite vividly, that her mother's social one had been rendered high service by the woman who saw, though most assuredly from mental rather than moral obliquity of vision, the good and not the bad. So that, on returning

to Stuttgart and finding Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim a widow, and the mother of five daughters whose marriageable qualities were what the French would term *difficile*, did what she could to mitigate her lot, and help her to a display of her wares.

While the Baroness sat thus enthroned upon her *canapè*, gazing about in comfortable abstraction, not being given to actual thought, her eyes fell upon the equipage of Count de Tocqueville rolling along the snow-covered roadway of the Neckar Strasse. There was no possible mistaking of its identity,—that glossy coupè, bearing an individual air equal with that of its possessor, whose own crest embellished the door panel, while below, interwoven with quaint arabesque, was the motto of *Albion perfide*, which he seriously declared the only good thing he had found in England, and, consequently, brought home, — *Honi soit qui mal y pense*,—a motto that, fortunately for his friends, was not possible of literal enforcement. For, owing to the vicarity of his general progress upon the highway of life, the observation could only have been observed in the lack of it.

The Baroness had barely time to darken her salon, de Tocqueville having informed her that he detested light in a raw state, and compose herself in a chair where she could comfortably escape those

satirically inquisitive side glances to which he was prone, when he was decorously announced by the little maid, to be, on her part, decorously received with surprise and delight.

"My dear Count, to what good fortune do I owe this early call?" She herself counted high noon in its proper relegation, and the most fitting time of the day to visit, but when in the company of one whose worldliness, from commanding her admiration, demanded her emulation, carefully endeavoured mildly to reflect him.

"I am, as usual, suffering from *ennui*; it is either that or *migraine*, you know."

"And you came to me to be amused? How flattering."

"I came to amuse myself," was the singularly prompt reply, received in perfect good faith and consequent equanimity, which, possibly, had she known what was in store, might not have been so stolid.

"I have scarcely seen you since Madame von Taubenheim's lovely reception, Count."

"No. I have been slowly convalescing from the shock. You call that a reception in Germany, do you? I was at a loss for proper classification. But if you have found the correct, I will venture that it was a very chilly one, sending me home, at my time of life, with a stomach frozen, literally frozen, with ices, and very indifferent ones at that."

"But she had such delicious honey cakes and — music," put in the Baroness reflectively, not finding anything else to add.

"In France," retorted the Count,—adopting much the same tone with which he would have announced "in Heaven"—"the inhabitants, at a certain age, I mean in genteel circles, are not supposed to possess any teeth, or at least those of a rhinoceros; and, when they undertake to entertain their friends, try to make them forget the fact, instead of, apparently, inviting them for the express purpose of its discovery, by employing a *chef* to *cook* the food they offer, not serve it raw like the English, nor yet as they do here, hardened to the consistency of stone, and then disguised in some fatty substance, — to prevent choking, quite possibly."

Had the Baroness been other, she would most certainly have asked him why he wandered away from such a culinary paradise into outer darkness and gnashing of teeth, or rather gums; but being one of those unhappy mortals who are always either temporizing or appeasingly apologetic, never succeeded in satisfying, or rather quieting, the unsatisfiable. "I had quite hoped that General von Schweinitz had entertained you hugely, and the darling old Madame von Brummelstein."

"Oh! I had quite forgotten them. Yes, they did amuse me intensely, but seemed not to appre-

ciate my entertainment. I won fifteen marks at *Sechs und Sechzig* from the two — combined — fifteen shillings, eighteen francs, fifty centimes, only think of it, and threw them both into a rage that threatened apoplexy. I can see the 'darling' von Brummelstein's cap-strings bobbing with rage now, and I don't doubt but von Schweinitz walked home to retrieve himself from ruin and a fiacre fare."

"I am glad, for your sake and my daughters', that the court will return from San Remo with the earliest mild weather. It will be other then, more exciting."

"Pray, madame, I beg of you, don't class me with babes and sucklings. The wonderful sensation of again beholding the few sprigs of nobility not obliged to eke out an existence on military infinitissimi, parading around on the Schloss Platz to the crash of horns, all screaming and blaring at once, *à la* Wagner, may be bliss untold to them, but hardly satisfying to a nature slightly maturer, and of the opposite sex."

"But," continued the Baroness, still appeasing and apologetic, serenely good humored or indifferent, and, most probably, not even deducting the possible though doubtfully implied compliment contained in his last words, that female Württemberg abroad was not to be reckoned with female

Württemberg at home, "but think of the morning concerts, the Hof balls, everything — maybe," wishing to be literal and consequently truthful.

"Only a repetition of what Madame von Taubenheim gave us, on a larger scale, a grand and thorough *soirée glacée*, with the men on one side of the salon, the women on the other, as they do at the *Stifts Kirche*,—not that I was ever there, *ciel* forbid,—and, as they do *not* do, the old people of both sexes chased off into some stuffy corner, like a kind of neuter gender, and put to playing cards."

"But, Count, our *Hof fêtes* are charming. We really never had anything to liken them at the ducal court of Seidlitz-Pfefferingen, where I was brought out,—nothing, not even when Her Grace Marie Sophia married the reigning Prince of Saxe-Armenhaus."

"*Mon Dieu*, I trust not. But there is one, yes, *one*, of those solemn riots which I can mentally record with actual gratification."

"You mean the *grossartige, poesievolle fest* which took place when the Princess Vera came on from Russia and married poor Eugene, *ach Gott!* How lovely that was!"

"No, I was spared the event. I refer to that *dîner* at which the near-sighted old Princess Gisela of Bavaria, mistaking the King for his

bête noire and cousin, the Crown Prince, told him in hearing of half the company that she hoped her dinner had not poisoned her, and trusted to find him celebrating *his* accession with a cook, the next time she came that way."

"Have you *migraine*, Count?" asked the Baroness, with such evident innocence and sincerity that he was charmed into genuine laughter at the unconscious satire of her query, charmed into making himself agreeable, as he so thoroughly knew how.

Leaving her in a quietly contented frame of mind, secure in the belief that he had given her some valuable hints as to the management of her most troublesome affairs temporal — her daughters, who, had de Tocqueville held the exclusive direction of their careers, would have been quite unlikely to settle down economical *haus Fräus*, as their mother's fondest ambition intended.

However, forgetful of past, and, it must be acknowledged, unrealized hopes, which her sanguine French friend had awakened, the general bent of his sophisticated conversation left her in a serene and subduedly joyful condition, further ensanguined on entering her cheerily heated dressing-room at Regolstein, after an exciting troika race, which to her had *not* been exciting, by the fact that Marie and Sophia displayed no unusual sleepi-

ness, while she herself had found two very crooked pins upon the stairway, which, pray kind Heaven, might mean a husband apiece for them.

Prince Daggerhof and his nephew Waldemar, two of the most eligible noblemen of Europe, were in full sight, and, but for the sweet prophecy of the pins, would have been sadly regarded, as so many others before them, with the hopeless aggravation in which a keen-eyed sportsman views a covey of birds whirr up from the grassy meadow, no means at hand to quell their flight. This good omen, however, had set just such fond emotions welling as once filled the breast of her ambitious grandmother,—emotions not supported on crooked pins, but a *minuet de la cour* danced by the elder Daggerhof with her own direct ancestress at a ducal Seidlitz-Pfefferingen ball. This pre-existing fact was, of course, unknown, and, most properly, would not have been considered if it had, for men, rich ones, are all regarded as eligible until their skeletons are securely articulated.

Ignorant that history was repeating itself, Prince Daggerhof, together with the other men of the party, was enjoying *vodki* punch in Zàpròny's library; and directly, finding himself alone with his host, the twain fell to talking, as reunited friends are wont, of what the years had brought them.

“You may imagine, *mon Prince*, that life, to me, is one long peal of happiness with such a woman as Madame. She grows every day brighter and more charming. At first, after our marriage, she was given to moments of melancholy, alternated with nervous excitement, and insomnia, that baffled all medical skill; being affected as she was at Petershof, on an occasion of which you know, when no one but de Tocqueville seemed able to compose her. Now, however, these attacks occur only at long intervals, and then when some object or circumstance recalls especially to mind an unhappy past, which it is my greatest joy to help her forget.”

“Dear Natalushka,” said the elder man, resting his hand for a moment upon the other’s arm, “I am glad that she has found so safe a haven.” Then, after a little silence, “You have a royal place, this Regolstein.”

“Which you have had the selfishness never to grace before.”

“How can you expect a Russian to leave Paris, until he is obliged, even for Heaven? Though Paris, now, is not the Paris of the past, a fact which renders absence a possibility, and a very enjoyable one at that, when spent with such kind friends. But I had seldom found you here, Not? You were at Rome. I heard of you at Cairo, St.

Petersburg, Teheran, every place, though never Paris."

"No ; Paris, even the borderlands of France, are swept from Natalushka's present, as I would to God they had been from her past. I had wanted to go there — soon after our marriage it was — but the bare prospect of the journey seemed to fill her with such actual agony that the proposition has never since been broached. Part of the time we are at Zàpròny ; again, at Vienna ; two years ago we spent the winter at San Remo, to be near Queen Olga, to whom Madame is devotedly attached, and who is the cause of our frequent presence here. But of late we have abandoned the Italian winters, travelling elsewhere."

"To my joy and intense relief," said de Tocqueville, entering in time to hear the Count's last words. "I can endure the court at Friedrichshafen, for the air of the lake makes me sleep most of the time ; and in stray moments of sensibility I can pay my *hommages* to the Empress Eugénie at Marienburg, and be amused by Madame, her lady in waiting, who has preserved her wit, if she has not her hair, and thus exist. But the fleeting moments which we spend there in summer, and here in winter, are, after all, possibly a moral edification, for they strengthen me in comforting assurances regarding my future state."

"Because that will be so much more exasperating?" queried the Prince, helping himself to punch.

"Far from it, but because I have lived, not without extracting amusement, in places with all the afflictions, though none of the advantages, and consequently comparing poorly with — Plutonia."

"My dear Count, did you for a moment suppose that I had relegated you to such a fate?" inquired the Prince laughingly.

"Was it not the most likely deduction for any of us to draw from the fiat of a friend?" re-queried the Count, turning for a final *soupçon* of vodki before responding to the Countess Zàpròny's message, just announced by a footman, that the ladies awaited them in the state salon.

Waldemar Daggerhof was standing in the shadow of a friendly *portière*, whence he had escaped various laboriously unskilful attempts on the part of Madame von Pappenheim-Waggenheim to fasten his attention upon her morphean treasures, when his uncle, together with Zàpròny, advanced to where the Countess formed the centre of an animated group. Singularly beautiful she looked to him that night, clad in a robe of wondrous, sheeny, cream brocade, from old Venetian loom, its stiff magnificence caught into rich folds by a loose, low-falling girdle of wrought silver,

blossoming in quaint arabesque of Saracenic lore. A fan of trailing ostrich plumes waved softly in her nervous grasp, or mingled with the rose rift in her cheeks, that had taken an unwonted glow from the keen air without. The red gold of her hair swept high upon her head, to fall in little clustering curls that faintly touched her brow, outlined in clear reflection by the dim tapestries, which rayed in faded colors from less sombre shadows. Silver standards, bearing the imprint of some rifled sanctuary treasury, held aloft a cloud of waxen tapers that lost their far-straying beams in the armorial knot and tracery which mingled overhead, breathing in quiet shadow the perfume straying to them in a dim past from the hand of a Verbruggen or a Van der Voort.

Later, as she moved among her guests, he noticed, betrayed so eloquently, even in the hand that rested in such perfect quiet upon Zàpròny's arm, the full confidence and sense of faith with which his strength inspired her, — Faith, looking proudly into his dark eyes, to see only the reflection of her own that so filled his heart.

Waldemar, standing there in the shadow, echoed, all unconsciously, that thought to which his uncle had just now given utterance: Natalushka has indeed found a safe haven in her knight's strong arms after a stormy day.

Les Sirenes was floating dreamily, lazily, through the sweet-scented air that held the breath of crimson roses and white lilacs ; *Les Sirenes*, languorous and sighing, like blossoms weary of their own perfume in the sultry summer night.

Waldemar turned away, sighing also, to the little Russian assigned him to escort to the supper-room. A mood was upon him that proved effort to shake loose from, — a mood that he would gladly have given its bent behind the portière'd tapestries, rather than escort a nineteenth-century mademoiselle to *Chablis* and oysters, even though they should happen to be served, as now, in an apartment hung about with silk of flame and cream, in semblance of a Turkish tent, which domed above a table where rare Venetian glass vied with rare plate, and strawberry kissed cheek with peach and grape beneath the mellow glow — *Allons !* moods in youth are not the fixed convictions that they are in age, and the brilliant atmosphere and conversation of the supper-room soon banished foreign shadows.

Even de Tocqueville seemed to forget himself between the courses, and relax into genuine enjoyment, which may, after all, have been only a direct result, but a result evidently heightened by the chatter of a wicked-looking old lady with a dazzlingly white complexion and very arched eye-

brows. As a noted critic of Vienna remarked to the dame next him, who herself remarked nothing, that Madame la Comtesse knew just what people to bring together, at once illustrating an unconscious satire, and quite amply proving the truth of the assertion; for his sole talent was to talk and hers to eat, which, as the *menu* was superb, she could do with equanimity, and consequently afford him uninterrupted silence. Later, after coffee and cigarettes,—just how it happened no one rightly knew, as is so often noted in gay company without intent,—they found themselves following their hostess, whose laughing challenge to reach the *Rosen Garten* first, echoed mistily through lofty halls, heavy with plaster nymph and arabesque in florid rococo tracery, harboring wealth of shadow, faintly lessened by the flickering rays of an antique lamp, held aloft, a guiding beacon, as they sped on, on, through dusky passages, into a portion of the castle left untouched when dedicated by the present owner to the service of his countess, whose white draperies glinted reflectant in uncertain flashes as she waved the light in gay defiance above her head, on reaching finally a massive door that opened upon a salon which, tradition said, had seen the tragic ending of a traitor prince, whose life-blood left deep tracings in the heart of the oaken floor.

But tradition received faint heeding : the stains were there, and might, or might not, be blood ; though, in a pile that had, God wot how many years, seen life's dawn fade into the quiet night of sleep, it would have proved small wonder if, with some, the twilight had been hastened.

Natalie only knew that, beyond, her *Rosen Garten*, gay in winter's feathery blossomings, swept down to the very terrace railing, overlooking dizzy heights, from which tradition, always accurate, had chronicled the traitor's body flung, — dizzy heights that lent themselves as watch-tower to the pictured scenery beyond, gleaming a proud attraction in the castle's varied treasury.

Zàpròny hastened, laughingly, to fling aside the barrier of the door that she might enter ; while de Tocqueville, whose French gayety for once had sustained the banishment of *ennui*, pressed close at hand.

But the panels proved stubbornly unyielding. Both men bore heavily ; then suddenly, with jarring, grating sound, the hasps flew wide apart, causing her to laugh a triumphant peal as she held the flaring light aloft, — a peal that choked into a startled shriek in mid-career. A great Venetian mirror, which hung between two low-swung windows, had fallen to the floor with deafening crash, but not before the Countess had seen the faces

of her husband and de Tocqueville in quivering reflection that shot down through trailing blackness to mingle with moonbeams, gleaming mistily above an inky shadow.



CHAPTER III.

LIEUTENANT KURD VON PALM left the *Reiter Kaserne* and slowly traced his way up the Ludwigsburger Strasse in rather an unenviable frame of mind. His head was heavy, and his pocket correspondingly light, from the combined result of wine and roulette, with which the holiday festivities had been properly and appropriately inaugurated.

The former delinquency was, unfortunately for Kurd, rather a nocturnal affair. But the roulette, at least at the mad rate which had distinguished it the previous evening, was not, although it took very much more of the former, it must be honestly confessed, than the latter to bring about that feeling of exaltative indifference which prompted him to believe that he must be enjoying himself, — a fact which in no wise either greatly increased or diminished his usual quiet, phlegmatic repose of feature beyond a slight flush of countenance, that, after all, may have rather added than detracted, because of a certain fictitious animation it lent to a physiognomy assuredly the reverse.

Indeed, from a personal point of view, whatever unpleasantness of mood under which he might now be laboring was entirely attributable to the roulette board. A gratuity of fourteen hundred marks, which the German government can ill afford to present as annual *douceur* to the lower commanding grade of its mainstay and countenance, will buy quite a great deal of *vin ordinaire* but very little roulette, even when played with that frugality of mind which distinguishes all personally defrayed Teutonic amusement.

Kurd's father, having enjoyed to the full a fortune that his wife, the daughter of an ambitious and well-to-do *fabrikant*, had brought him, retired from a scene in which his personal deportment had been none too commendable, in affairs other than roulette and wine, though equally undomestic, leaving his heart's partner the poorer, from a pecuniary point of view, than the privilege of an advanced social position exactly warranted.

But she, being an exemplary person, rather from lack than possession of understanding, and feeling her latter end at hand, built an admirable mausoleum to contain the bones of her husband, and incidentally her own,—a proceeding doubtless fraught with certain satisfactory positiveness, yielding comfortable conviction that now, at least, she could rest assured of the exact whereabouts

of her rightful protector, a fact which in life had been singularly denied her.

Careful harvesting of mausoleumic remnants revealed, to their joint heir, the knowledge that barely enough remained for mess-bills and uniforms, leaving what de Tocqueville designated as "military infinitissimi" to be dedicated on the shrine of personal elevation, with a result already chronicled.

Perhaps, however, a conversation that he had just held with his friend, Captain von Rüder, somewhat augmented in extent these elevatory after-effects, and added to an already perturbed condition.

Feeling the contracted horizon of his joys pecuniary, von Rüder, consequent upon a decidedly severe and protracted struggle, had concluded to lay his heart, and a presentation at court, at the feet of Fraulein Katrina Scheidermantel, whose father had already earnestly, nay, pressingly indicated, that the necessary *dot*, including even the number of linen required by a patriarchal government for its favored children, was at his command and disposal, in consideration of an equivalent responsibility, not embraced until debts, as long as the arm of the law, threatened a culmination even more disagreeable than matrimony; which alternative was only accepted when a parent, throughout so broadly and generously disposed,

had agreed, on the indifferent inference that his child would be accordingly tolerated, to appease the maw of past extravagance.

Furthermore, feeling, as is proverbially acknowledged, anxious for a partner in his woes, Fräulein Katrina not being considered, the amiable captain had endeavored by rhetoric most eloquently persuasive, though personally accepted with reluctance, to convince Kurd that a like loving bond would be most appropriate to one, though poor in means and years, with hereditary talent far beyond both. But Kurd was of a different temperament from the ancestor whose doubtful talents he had somewhat inherited, possessing also, in a degree, the theoretically romantic German disposition of his mother, which reluctantly allowed a change of life whose responsibilities and trials had set with butterfly lightness upon his translated progenitor.

Still more, there was, as is sometimes the wont of youth, a strong and conclusive reason, attributable to that mentally youthful organ, the heart, a prior attachment, — an attachment where *dots* and linen garments could, alas! form no conclusive reasoning; the bright object of his pastoral being none other than Joseffa von Pappenheim-Waggenheim, the fourth daughter of the redoubtable Baroness, and his own cousin, whose pecuniary attractions

were strikingly limited, owing to a line of ancestors of remarkably aggravated "von Rüderic" proclivities, who transmitted naught but the only undisposable article at their command, a name, and that quite incidentally, as a result of full value received, to be similarly acted upon, or not, as descendent fancy might dictate.

It was with thoughts of Joseffa in his somewhat perturbed brain that Kurd wended his steps toward the lower *Anlagen* in preference to the Königs Strasse, where already a number of brother officers were bravely displaying personal attractions with various aim.

He had traversed by-paths and skirted shrubberies until, at last, Rosenstein with its severe façade swept near at hand; and there, signalling him gayly with her handkerchief from just within the railing, was the object of his thoughts, together with her two sisters and Fräulein Putz, their near-sighted but indefatigable governess.

"Come, Kurd, come! What do you think? Fräulein Putz's cousin is on duty here to-day, and he will let us all in for nothing."

"To Wilhelma too, and you can come with us!" put in the other sisters in unison. "We've been coming, oh! ever so often, hoping he might happen to be here, and never found him until to-day."

"My charges, the demoiselles," asserted Fräulein Putz, "are to-day to be admitted, without pecuniary equivalent, on the part of my relative, who, knowing the thirst for the beautiful which animates them, shrinks from the necessary form, which I pray the Herr Lieutenant will not mention, as the *Obersthofmeister* is particular about tickets."

Kurd gravely acquiesced with his stateliest military salute, well aware that those same motives of economy which actuated a kingly government to charge fifty *pfennige* to view its treasures, caused Fräulein Putz to refrain from paying the same, that her own might view them, "my cousin" being immediately and unexpectedly rewarded for his artistic disinterestedness from Kurd's alarmingly meagre private collection; and together the little party entered to inspect the Cupids, Dianas, and Junos placed there by a former sovereign, whose admiration for Oriental customs and Occidental art had frequently embarrassed himself and others intimately concerned.

"How is mamma to-day?" questioned Kurd, who, together with Joseffa, had loitered somewhat in advance of the remainder of the party, more from mutual enjoyment in each other's society than a lack of appreciation for Rosetti's Esmeralda teaching her goat to read, which, from the ecstatic "Ach's!" coming faintly to them through

deserted corridors, had won a place in the youthful von Pappenheim-Waggenheim estimation not even accorded Gegenbaur's Olympus.

"How is mamma to-day?" echoed Joseffa abstractedly, having heard his query, but first palpably realized on repetition; her thoughts being at that moment—just where, she felt uncertain, until all doubt as to their focus being her maternal relative was positively made evident.

"I don't know; oh, yes!—how stupid of me!—quite well. She is always well, you know, like the rest of us. But Madame la Comtesse Zàpròny is very ill, and she drove out to see her just before we left. She wanted Marie and Sophia to go too; but they have been asleep for a day or two,—indeed, ever since the supper party at Regolstein."

"And Fräulein Putz improved the opportunity by improving your minds. But here I am, a weight and hindrance generally. Suppose I leave you?" he added in a moment of forgetful unselfishness, which would have been assuredly regretted had her reply been other.

"I cannot well see why. We have the whole afternoon, and you are more capable than Fräulein Putz to tell me all about the pictures and things. You have seen them ever so often—haven't you?"

"Let us sit down here," he proposed by way

of answer; and then, preparatory to improving her mind, "I have wanted to talk with you for ever so long, but it seems that we can never get together alone. Do you remember what lovely talks we used to have when I got off from cadet school on leave, and came to Pappenheim?"

"And how you made me cry—running your sword through my best bonnet, to show how sharp it was? Of course I do. Would any girl be likely to forget that?"

A vague surprise filled him. The Joseffa of old was hardly capable of evading so skilfully a direct question. Then he suddenly remembered that maybe the Kurd of old would not have angled for the possible answer which he had awaited. He ventured again: "Do you know, I was enraged beyond anything at having to walk with Charlotte and Fräulein Putz all the way from Saint Catherine's to the Neckar Strasse on Christmas Day, after waiting around the entire morning to take you down to the Schloss Platz for the music?"

"I am sure," with great moral tendency of tone, "that it was very selfish of you not to take us then, when we should all have enjoyed it so much."

"But I should not," was the manly reply. "Two more squares of Fräulein Putz would have been the death of me." Then they both laughed, and a general feeling of mutual fellowship became

momentarily established — an establishment to be ruthlessly destroyed by his masculine lack of tact in a very short space of time.

“If you had not been so mean, and had walked with me, instead of behind me to make sport of our combined appearance the entire way, I would have gone to Ludwigsburg to hear the music.” A very strong assertion, as Ludwigsburg was nine miles distant, and the native music of an extremely indifferent, cavalry description.

“It would have been highly improper for me to present myself upon the Schloss Platz with a young man,” was the haughty and severe response.

“I am sure Fräulein Putz was with us.”

“She was with *you*,” came the response, rendered in a significance of tone and feminine conclusiveness which forbade a prolongation, and consequent allowance that Charlotte, who was older than herself, had also been of the immediate trio.

“It is very silly of you to act as if you were grown up,” was the masculine assertion, forgetful of both circumstances, that he had been endeavoring to prove the fact to her for a good thirty minutes, and that Charlotte had borne the brunt of conversation on the occasion under discussion.

“*You* may deem it silly,” was the response,

delivered with accumulated von Pappenheim-Waggenheim dignity, "but *I* am not going to have the world making all kinds of surmises."

"Haw, haw, haw!" came in unmitigated scorn from the young lieutenant, who had brought things to a crisis, but hardly after the fashion which he had intended.

"When it's only my nasty, hateful old cousin! Boo, hoo, hoo!" This last from the depths of a handkerchief that one short half-hour ago had fluttered him a welcome of joyful expectancy. To make matters more serious, the balance of the von Pappenheim-Waggenheims were heard clumping it over the parquet floor in their immediate vicinity. Clearly, his opportunities, though rare, were not improved with a relative success.

"O Seffa, Seffa! Please forgive me—please, dear! I know I am a nasty, hateful, ugly old thing,—all, and more; and you are just right to say so, too!"

"No, I am *not*!" was the startlingly unforeseen reply. "It's me that's nasty and hateful, and—oh! everything!" with increasing desperation, to be followed by renewed sobs, that distractingly bade fair to become even more severe by the time Fräulein Putz put in an appearance. "Let—us get out of—their—way," was her immediate proposal, a proposal which startled him by its

originality, and also awakened the suspicion that their, up to the present, hardly enjoyable conversation might have been more skilfully, and quite possibly more agreeably, manœuvred, if not taken so summarily into his own hands.

She preceded him in silence for some moments, keeping him at a respectful distance by certain eloquent movements of the head and elbows, which were frequently akimbo to support her handkerchief, whenever he presumed upon the limit.

"Where are you both?" came presently in Fräulein Putz's sharpest accents, as she groped along the walls to get a final optical grab at the pictures.

"We are going to wait for you on the stairway," interposed Kurd, with haphazard promptness, observing gratefully meanwhile that Joseffa, whose arms were still given to an akimbo attitude, bade fair to bring up in that vicinity.

"It is good; it is good," echoed the clear, shrill accents, which at one and the same time brought to two of her pupils the conviction that she had found a gem, and hastened to inspect it; while two more, one of whom was not her pupil, felt secretly somewhat guilty at such unqualified indorsement of their line of action.

"Seffa, say that you forgive me for my cruel, unmannerly roughness; won't you, dear?"

She raised her tearful blue eyes to the deeper blue of his, that bent so tenderly above her own ; and something in them prompted him to raise her hand and kiss it softly, forgetful of the world beside, as they stood there together in the faint winter sunshine that enwrapped them both, forgetful that they were on the stairway of Schloss Rosenstein, and in full view of passing curious eyes, until recalled to present actuality by a voice, the voice of Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim, who, from a certain acerbity of tone, had evidently witnessed the entire proceeding, notwithstanding that she solicited the company of Joseffa in her coupé drive homewards with a verbal affection which should have quite disguised the tone of its announcement, and would, most probably, but that guilty ears are quick ones.

Leaving Kurd, as they drove away, in full conviction that he was, on grounds of general wretchedness and misery, fully justifiable in following a course immediately projected, — a course which required unlimited wine for its fulfilment ; likewise a course void of skeletonian excuse had he but been present in the coupé, for Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim, having just enjoyed a lengthy and instructive monologue from de Tocqueville, grappled with affairs temporal in a manner worthy even his unqualified approbation,

evinced practical application of his wisdom which, doubtless, had he not been in ignorance, would somewhat have compensated him for a *tête-à-tête* undergone with an unselfishness never displayed in the service of any other creature than that of Natalie Zàpròny. For, knowing the nerves of *la Comtesse* in anything but the state to submit to a course of practical and well-meant, but clumsy and maybe inquisitive, sympathy, immolated himself, as even men have been known to do for some revered clay idol.

But Kurd, not having the double advantage accruing de Tocqueville of discretion and obviation, embraced a course most in accord with his own youthful ideas. Determining, doggedly, as so large a portion of the day had hardly yielded him what could be termed *lively* enjoyment, not to let the few remaining hours be classed in the same glum category, and after some uncertainty as to whether Rudolsheimer would be better alone or in company, decided upon von Rüder's proffered invitation to a *kneipe*, held in celebrant announcement of his *verlobung* with the attractive Katrina, whose mother had noted the loving consummation by a *kaffée visite* that same afternoon, although her guests had, to state with all proper frankness, gone home in far less outward exhilaration of spirits than those of her prospective son-in-law bade fair to.

Little Klappersdorf was banging away on the piano when Kurd entered, and singing a song which no one could distinguish as to words or tune, even had the gay clang of tongues been hushed for that express purpose, — as sometimes phenomenally occurs in polite society — for Klappersdorf's accompaniment, like his drinking, was of such energetic description as to occupy his entire attention, and, had they wished for the inspiring sentiment thereof, would have been forced to receive the same without its present extinguishing feature.

Things were evidently well under way. No *soirée glacé* languor could easily have been detected, even by a de Tocqueville. All was life, enjoyment, animation, from the sabres and caps hung all in a row, sawying in unison with jingling glasses, to the trim maids who fluttered in and out from the general *saal* to this cosey corner dedicated celebrant to a heart's attainment. The sanded floor reflected back through haze of smoke the squares of plastering that looked uncertain, wavering, in frames of groined, black oak.

Stiff, starched Swiss curtains shut out the night's gloom and all curious passing gaze, while sharp click of pewter lids against a score of glasses brought again the smiling maids with deft hands blooming in half a dozen mugs, which dripped and

foamed together as they were gayly borne across the spattered floor.

Each loud explosion of laughter brought a glimpse of the kindly face of the *Haus-frau*, as she leaned far over from her throne behind the *bureau*, sending a broad and comely beam that swept to farthest corner of the room and back again, that all might feel *zu hause*.

They were all there, and waved a greeting to him as he took his place,—all, from old Oberst-major von Göppingen, who, since his retirement, had been able to do only two things, drink and scatter anecdotes,—a military quality in no wise purely national,—down to Second Lieutenant Nassfeldt, sitting next him, who bore his epaulettes with the same elaborate indifference with which he wiped the beer from an undiscernible moustache. The married and single, irrespective of age, had met to greet and say good-by with one accord. Only the subject of matrimony was in no wise touched upon, ever so lightly, even by the single ones, until sufficient quantity of enjoyment sparkled in their veins to enable them to cope with it in becoming fortitude. As for the married ones, they required even more copious draughts than their ex-brethren to bring about a necessary stage of equanimity.

War, the chase, cadet-life, and gay days on

urlaub passed in glittering review, until at last, from his post at the head of the table, von Rüder sang out, —

“Bier auf Wein
Dass lasst Du sein,
Aber Wein auf Bier
Dass rath Ich Dir.”

A *lebe Hoch!* a flurry of bottles, flying corks, and jingling glasses, and the happy point is reached which toasts a blazing battery or married life with equal joy and fervor.

Kurd forgot all about Joseffa, — Joseffa and her tearful, dark-blue eyes; forgot the little hand that lay in his like some fluttering bird that afternoon, and toasted and toasted with the rest.

Klappersdorf was at the piano again, wailing at the top of his lungs, which, though of lustiest character, poorly coped with the muscles of his fingers.

Increased animation marked the friendly groups at the table, each thump on the piano being echoed by a peal of laughter that in no wise interfered with the earnestness of its merciless operator, who, even had he been sufficiently conceited to appropriate the flattery, could not well have discerned it, because of his own energy. A pensive mellowness pervaded them all, extending even to Freiherr Oberst von Schwingermühle, who was willing to toast anybody, anything, even his own

wife, and no longer used, necessitously, his napkin, pulley-fashion, to raise a glass that twitching muscles, caused by multiplicity of service rather more to Bacchus than Mars, failed to accomplish with desired rapidity. Rittmeister Klause patted the breast-pocket of his military frock in fierce, determined emphasis, causing a peal of laughter which widened, circled, until all glasses tapped, and gay voices mingled in wishing him and his "intentions," well, for it was a standard joke throughout the regiment that Klause was always, and at all seasons, intending firmly to send off a letter to the father of some fair one, offering her his heart and name. But the letter, the offer, and the heart had all grown more or less legendary, being as such mentioned, except when he himself announced all three as shortly to be posted, clinching the emphasis with fierce, determinate mien, as now.

The National Hymn thumped out from the piano in the corner, — King, Queen, country, Kaiser collectively, lustily toasted, having previously been honored singly. Then wives and sweethearts, as they also had been once before. Glasses dashed to earth that no one more might desecrate; a jangling of sabres over courtyard cobblestones; last gay good-nights; and Kurd wandered down the quiet street with a comrade

not quite as steady as sentimental, who trolled softly under his breath, "Two eyes so blue and tender," trolled with a sweetness which banished all memory of the smoke-filled, wine-fumed room, giving instead a pair of blue eyes looking into his, that had no thought of the sunshine above them, except in aiding his reflection, no memory of a world beyond his heart. A lump came into his throat and a mist into his eyes.

Why must they be doomed to wander apart, when so many, joyless, were able to link lives together?

Why should the pelf of a world, powerless to buy the riches of two young hearts—as he so fondly believed, eternally loving—bar thus apart by a deeper abyss than the loveless.

He clanged his sword angrily along the *trottoir* and swore aloud at the folly. A respectful cough from some passing policeman warned him that he awakened sleeping burghers.

He tightened his sword-belt, straightened his broad shoulders, and grasping the arm of his comrade they went down the Neckar Strasse, trolling softly together, "Two eyes so blue and tender." For the glamour of wine had got into his vision. He could sweep through space, cutting stars from their orbits, could brave, harder still, cold and hunger, or a world's slight-

ing eyes, if he had her — and have her he would, he thought and firmly purposed ; maybe a moment hence lightly forgot it. But on he went trolling, "Two eyes so blue and tender," two eyes that had wept themselves to sleep hours ago in a little room which he passed, homeward loitering. Eyes whose owner, when questioned by sisterly sympathy if the cause of her grief were not disappointment at being brought home in the coupé, instead of seeing Wilhelma as they did, responded in most emphatic affirmative that convulsed with fresh sobs the poor little voice uttering it.

But after a while both the man and the woman had forgotten their heartache, he through the wine-cup, and she through her weeping and praying.



CHAPTER IV.

THE air was soft and balmy, hinting of the breath of spring. A few white clouds swam lazily in depths of blue. The snow had vanished, save some stray dejected patches on Hasenberg or Bopser, raising now aloft, unburdened, a wealth of fir-decked coronal to greet the beaming sunlight. And Waldemar Daggerhof, as he wended his way along the Castle Place, towards Palais Varasov, almost expected to see the pansy beds show trace of blossom between the pine boughs sheltering them.

"Madame la Comtesse was at home and would receive him," was the answer presently delivered. And, abstractedly, he fell to studying his surroundings, until the mistress of them should appear to bid him welcome.

The reception room into which he had been ushered was a quaint little place, barely escaping stuffiness, and oddly insignificant when compared with Regolstein, so sumptuously grand, — although Prince Daggerhof could have told him

of evenings spent in this same *suite* which rivalled in brilliance many a soirée of the old Faubourg Saint Germaine. For this had been the home of Cleopatra Varasov and still bore her name, besides the imprint of her living ownership. It had been occupied by Natalie on her return from France, and then, as now, remained unchanged to hold through span of a second generation the stamp left upon it by an ever-busy, scheming brain. Indeed it was Madame's portrait now that caught and fascinated his attention, although he did not know the subject but that its beauty held him. The pose, an original caprice, was one which had filled a great artist's soul with enthusiasm, and, tradition said, a stronger feeling had imbued his brush with glow and languor of the East, lavished upon a form that flashed and breathed in sensuous life from out a darkling background.

The attitude was half-reclining on a couch of richest furs, that swept away in mellow browns or opaque blacks — transparent gloom.

A robe of creamy white fell loosely from her shoulders, confined only at the breast with a branch of roses heavy and languorous; a faint spray of tender green trailing against the waxen whiteness of her bosom, from which the drapery swept like clouds of milky cumuli along a summer

sky, floating and falling close, suggesting then defining line and curve, until it melted with the heavy curtains meeting it.

A wreath of gems, made in the form of ancient laurel crown, gathered the glossy blackness of her tresses high upon her head, save for a few low-falling bands half-revealing a high brow.

The profile was sharp cut, but perfect. Cruel, but passionate and loving. Thin lipped, but breathing sensuousness from eyes that shone beneath straight, blackly pencilled brows, fixed with a dreamy penetration.

Gems crept in graduating waves, set sequin-fashion, mingling at last a double rope that lost itself in quaint medallion above a perfect shoulder.

One hand rested upon the creamy flow of drapery, the other, with its full moulded arm arched like an ivory bow against the heavy plush, poised on a slender curving wrist and taper fingers.

Only in the hand was a resemblance between mother and daughter. A hand which in its tense steel muscles held a power to stifle life or smother in caresses.

Some flowers had fallen forward on the couch, --roses; and, as Waldemar more closely scanned them, he saw thorns set thickly, up to the very

petals curling so waxily innocent, and smiled at the satire, that to their portrayer may have meant a deeper pain, as he turned to kiss Madame Zàpròny's outstretched hand, a reproduction of that same soft hand above him, from which even a *gant de Suède* could faintly veil the character.

"What pleasure, Madame, to congratulate you, in person, upon your recovery from an illness which has caused your friends so much alarm."

"Not illness, Monsieur, I am never ill," she returned, beaming her brightest smiles upon him. "It was only my stupid nerves. They play me false sometimes, and make me such a foolish coward, trembling at a grass blade in the moonlight or a falling leaf."

"Which, from the realities you suffer, might as well be a flashing dagger or a falling sword."

"Oh! if you please, nothing so dreadful. You see you have set me to shivering already," was her quick reply, given laughingly, but with a ring of earnestness in the tone which warned him that her nerves were weak, a weakness bravely held in leash, but for a clutching of the hands that ever betrayed her, and recalled again the pictured ones. "We women are ever so weak," she added half-apologetically, and with the same forced smile, "that to talk of falling daggers and moonlight is not the wisest way of welcoming us to convalescence."

"A blunder that leaves me all contrition and confusion at my stupidity, which meant so well; utterly disproving, too, my good uncle's favorite epigram that 'ignorant ignorance is the most comforting comfort.'" This last in such tenor of gloomy lugubriousness that she broke forth into a peal of laughter. Laughter that considerably relieved the recrimination of his *faux pas*.

"No, it proves two things and disproves nothing. Your ignorance is not of the comforting description, but only masculine well-intention."

"Let us hope that it is not always so unfortunate in its results."

"Why, you have amused me. Do you regret the kindly effort? It were fortunate if all masculine well-intention were so successful."

"Maybe, after all, you are proving, in contrary fashion, my uncle's philosophy, by giving me the ignorance to appropriate the comfort your own ingenuity has derived."

"It is not often that men are so humble," was her still laughing reply, "and in your instance humility shall be rewarded. I am going to take you to see a beautiful picture at the gallery, and then — fancy — imagine?"

"To take me one step higher and show me a beautiful woman?"

"Of course, I should have expected it. I deserve all—more—than I got for my rash folly. Yes, I am going to take you to see a beautiful woman, for goodness is always beauty. Indeed, by that reckoning, I may say a very beautiful woman. Ah! revenge is sweet. 'Let us away,' as they say at the play."

"As they also say at the play, 'Your words fill me with alarm.' You may intend taking me to a convent. Your ambiguity is sinister. Besides, I am more than satisfied, for here I have both the picture and its golden step."

"Ah! poor mamma," said the Countess softly.

"But you do not even ask who this great unknown, this charming fair one is."

"I utterly refuse to listen. I make my ears deaf, like the adder."

"But you will hear her, if you do not me. I am going to take you to see the Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim." Waldemar's countenance broke into a sudden, irrestrainable smile.

"I knew you would be pleased."

"I am always pleased to obey Madame's commands."

"I noticed the alacrity a moment ago."

"But the picture?"

"'Hope springs eternal,' as the English say. Yes, the picture is beautiful. Though, had the

lady reached Madame von Pappenheim-Waggenheim's age, she would not, by far, have been so attractive for lack of many qualities. Cleopatra—the Cleopatra of Markart.”

Waldemar expressed a proper amount of delight at being allowed such artistic privilege, remembering, quite suddenly, de Tocqueville's assertion that virtue, with savages an instinct, is, with civilized nations, an accomplishment, successful, like other accomplishments, only so far as the talent leads—and, in this particular instance, from, of course, a purely masculine point of view, could hardly recognize a just comparison, involving individual traits to the other quite foreign; but ventured, naturally, no remark, and smiled approvingly upon Madame, who was carefully selecting some long-stemmed ‘Cornelia Cooks’ from a slender crystal vase,—roses of the creamy hue that blended with others of a deeper shadow blossoming along the portrait on the wall. And in one of those furtive optical voyages from her face to the canvas, just when he was most critically considering the relative beauties of the living and the pictured one she raised her head and smiled; then, realizing fully the bent of his study, her eyes, those languorous, tawny eyes, grew very misty and her lips formed “Poor mamma.”

"Forgive me, Madame," he said softly, "I seem doomed to wound you."

"No, no," came in quick reply, with ready smile, "I tell you it is only my stupid nerves, they are so weak."

"A fact which I should have better held in mind."

"Than to call attention to my dear mother's picture? No, that should have grown a comfort, not a pain. In trouble, in loneliness, a mother's heart is always the truest haven. But somehow, I never seemed to have that comfort. Perhaps it was because mamma was so grand, so beautiful — to be worshipped rather than entreated. In my life I have ever been strangely without that sense of protection which goes to make the weak so strong. Except for dear old Tocqueville," she added as an after-thought, and in scarce audible tone. Then, suddenly realizing herself, flushed, and broke into a laugh that echoed poorly the tenor of her words.

Looking down, he saw the roses torn, scattered, petal on petal, a heap of pearls upon the parquet floor. The stems, broken, leafless, were weaving in and out between her restless, nervous fingers, that laced and interlaced together. But she had regained herself and was once more the woman of the world. Gay, bright, maybe a trifle feverishly

so, anxious to start at once for the gallery, that he might see Cleopatra, to her the only picture of the whole collection.

“What a feeling of pleasure the mere sense of motion gives one!” she exclaimed, as they rolled towards their destination. “People say of Munich that it is such a slow town that the Judgment Day will not come until fifty years after it has happened to the rest of the world. But Stuttgart, dear, sleepy old Stuttgart, is slower still.”

“And you have to resort to artificial locomotion to feel that you are existing?” was his amused query.

“Yes, just that. I am unable to endure more of its peaceful monotony, a prolongation of it, now. And Zàpròny telegraphed his orders to Vienna yesterday to have our Palais in the Herrn Gasse made ready for immediate occupancy. Think of Vienna now. The gayety, the brightness of the streets, the very air. Not as it gleams here, like sunshine drowsing, but crisp, clear, fresh, joyous. So that one feels like taking draughts of champagne in at every breath.”

“The season, too, will soon be in full sway, Madame la Comtesse, and that holds, possibly, as great an animation for you as the air,” was Waldemar’s smiling interpolation, glad to see her so thoroughly herself again; though puzzled at the

glimpse of something lying deeper, which to-day had twice been accidentally revealed. But the bright exhilaration now upon her gave no time for surmise, as her gay mood jangled on.

"Yes, the balls, receptions, operas, cumbrous court festivities glistening with diamonds and decorations — oh ! that will be life again. We poor children of the world, bitten by the tarantula of sensation, must have it course wilder, madder in our veins until the heart no longer throbs."

"After all," he said, leaning back on the luxurious cushions, and watching with half-closed eyes the flitting animation in her face, "after all, what is life but a series of sensations, a varied melody that plays upon the gamut of our passions until the strings are snapped. A happy man he who, dying, can truthfully say that he has lived and analyzed them all."

"No, the living I can grasp, but not the analyzation. Thought and hope may be at birth twin sisters, but in development no heart can hold them both. And hope is but sensation realized ; so why destroy it. Come. Here we are. Let us look upon a woman who lived, until, the melody of living hushed, took, rather than jarring discord — death."

"You hold, then," he said smilingly, as he assisted her to alight, "that what we hope for we

must realize, — how, at what cost, it matters not ; and having for our own to drain the draught, not questioning the method or the dregs.”

“I mean just what you say, but that the method and the dregs are one and — thought.”

The gallery was quiet, almost deserted, save for their footfalls echoing vacantly from walls oppressed with melancholic suggestions in oils ; which Madame, as they loitered slowly, deemed well avoided by more than passing glance as fullest due for such pictorial ghosts, until her mood grew quite another, on reaching the little side salon containing Markart's gem, that blossomed like some wondrous vision from all the dull surrounding.

The barge, heavy with gorgeous flowers that mingled their last breath with draperies from Sidon and from Tyre, trailed prow to stern along the rippling waters of the faint-hued Nile, gleaming in languid ripples as they kissed its breast.

Beneath a canopy which rivalled in its rich embroideries the hue of birds of Paradise, rested the languorous Queen, her eyes fixed far away upon a horizon that held her Antony, her rich lips trembling with the thoughts that filled her heart.

Great fans of ostrich plumes on golden staffs made ripple in the scented evening air, as slaves and serving women, grouped with voluptuous

grace, hung on her slightest bidding, while ebon, muscular and grand, lithe, powerful Ethiopian chiefs lent straining might that told of vanquished lions, strangled serpents, to aid the progress of her glittering barge upon its voyage.

A little Love, gay garlanded with flowers, stood at the helm, and watched the seething foam plume as it broke upon the prow.

The evening sky, first primrose, then a glowing opal, hinting amethyst, dreamed of a twilight rich with stars. And from the hazy plains beyond a fresh breeze, filling the sails, rushed from the picture.

While these two pondered on the painted scene, theorizing and philosophizing of the life that lived, not far away in this same Neckar Strasse poor little Joseffa von Pappenheim-Waggenheim was left to work, alone, a problem that for Cleopatra, great, mighty, beautiful, had been too difficult to solve.

She was thinking of Kurd and crying softly behind the moreen curtains of the salon, when lo! before she could put her face into anything like a condition to warrant the coin fiction that she had not been crying at all, the cause of her maidenly agitation entered and was standing before her, with sword dragging awkwardly between his legs, cap brim held shuffling to and fro between

his fingers, and such a general presentment of boyish, hopeless, alack-a-day expression in his face, that her mood changed and she burst out laughing, "O Kurd! how ridiculous you look."

"Thanks," very stiffly, likewise with change of mood, ditto position.

"I wish you could have seen yourself."

"I'm sure your own appearance is hardly handsomer. There, there, for pity's sake don't begin again. You always stop me from saying what I had intended, which must have been the right thing, for your prompting never seems to dictate it."

"Never mind, you won't have me for long, I'll soon be gone." This with such a resigned and positive air of speedy transition, that it was his turn to look ready to weep.

"Goodness gracious, Joseffa, you haven't gone and got the consumption or some of those things?"

"No, I wish I had. I'm go—going to Vienna."

"Oh! is that all," heaving a large sigh of sudden and intense relief.

"All! all! So you are not sorry that I am going? I might have known it all along. You don't care for anybody or anything but yourself. Men never do."

"Seffa! Seffa! how was I to—"

"How were you to feel sorry? I'm sure I don't

know. If you were at all sympathetic you'd be *glad*. Glad like I am."

"I regret exceedingly I cannot weep for joy, but strangely it does not affect me that way, at least just now, though I'd like to oblige you."

"Yes," she continued, quite ignoring his personal traits of feature. "Mamma has gone out now, to buy me three new dresses, and Marie and Sophia are asleep, and Charlotte and Francesca have gone walking with Fräulein Putz, and that's the reason I'm all alone."

"Oh, Seffa dear! How glad I am. I have not spent a happy moment since you left me at Schloss Rosenstein. I could not bring myself to come and learn what the result might be."

"Were you afraid of mamma?"

"Seffa! Seffa!" in a tone deep fraught with recrimination, although his face glowed like the band about his cap.

"Well," slightly relenting, "you have no cause for thinking or surmising anything unpleasant, so far as she is concerned, for her humor has been lovely, ever since — you know, — and I only wish, if such good result were wrought, that it, or something like it, might happen every day."

"Quite possibly it may, when you go to Vienna." Whereupon she began to weep afresh, of course from joy at bare mention of the jaunt in store.

“Oh Seffa ! Seffa !” he said, taking her plump hand softly between his palms, from whose broad grasp she tried with gradually desisting effort to reclaim it, “why cannot you understand me rightly, what my heart means but my lips so badly utter, that I love you, love you better than anything in the whole world.”

This produced no result save to increase her tearful bent, and he was beginning quite seriously to think that he might not expect any answer at all — though for the present he was amply content to hold her hand, — when the sobs became less frequent, then, finally, almost ceased.

“Kurd, you must know the foolishness of this. Even if I do — I mean even if I did care for you, this is impossible. Mamma would never let us marry. I have no *dot*, not a bit.”

“Never mind the *dot* !” he cried with large disdain.

“If you had any of your own, it might be ‘never mind.’ But I heard mamma, only yesterday, say to Marie and Sophia not to dare look at the von Meiningens after *one* dance, and they have much, much more than you. Oh, it’s no use ! It’s no use !” followed by fresh and copious tears.

“Listen, dear, I have something. I know that it is precious little, and not enough yet to reach the army standard. But wait ; I’ll be a first lieu-

tenant, then a captain some day, and by that time — ”

“By that time I'll be quite an old lady and you won't want me. Has that ever occurred to you?” was her startlingly realistic, matter-of-fact reply.

“I can't say that it has,” he answered hesitatingly, after trying vaguely to picture the sweet, fresh face before him, crowned with its clustering curls, old, worn, wrinkled, waiting for him — for him. A mist came into his eyes. He could no longer advance hopeful theories, no longer grasp the future's veil and dare it show his bidding.

The helplessness, the utter vanity, of his poor hopings seemed so clear. Other people in the world had lived and loved before and never mated. Other lips had claimed their vows and heart's allegiance, and they still had lived — lived an existence, when they might have lived a life.

Hate, bitter, scathing, filled his heart, and blind, beating rage choked his very breath, that love, love strong enough to bear aloft a world, should beat its wings against the cage-bars of despair — grim, hopeless, and admitting no reclaim.

On slowly looking up she saw, with tearful gaze, the pain of hopelessness reflected in his face, the mist before his bright young eyes.

Then was the woman in her stronger than the

man in him, a power that found awakening in his pain and strength in soothing it.

"Kurd, this is not manly. Look what you have before you — life — a future. War may yet put you where you never dreamed. You may rise up, up, until you shine all over when you go to court, like General von Schwafelstein, and here you sit looking as if everything were done, at an end, and you were to be shot to-morrow."

"*Mein Gott!* I wish I was!" came in muffled reply.

"All, everything, because you cannot have just what the moment dictates. You will forget all about it in a week. I'm just sure you will."

Kurd was equally sure that eternity would find him of unchanged opinion.

"People often change their minds. I am quite sure mamma changed hers. Do you know, I found a miniature yesterday in an old trunk in the store-room, a miniature that was not papa nor any of us, and when I brought it to mamma she cried and kissed it, when she thought I was not looking. Now, how would *he* have felt if he had waited for mamma?"

Kurd pondered lugubriously a space, then the possible idea of doughty knight aspiring still for Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim's comfortable hand, burst fully upon him and he had to

laugh, at first against his will ; then, when Joseffa joined the peal his heart seemed eased by half.

“Kurd, Kurd, what a bright idea. When I go down to Vienna with the Countess Zàpròny I will try to get a rich, oh ! a *very* rich husband, and when he dies, like your papa and mine, why, I shall be left a widow, and, who knows —” She tried to laugh, but somehow it was a dismal little attempt. While he stormed about the room, clanking his sabre very heavily after him, and called her heartless, vowed that she had been merely amusing herself with him, trifling with his feelings. He would never trust a woman more, with all her innocence that veiled deceit, and subterfuge all truth.

Yet still, even though she had her way and changed his bent, her quivering lips looked sadder now, by far, than when he had cursed fate and what his lot bereft him.

Going softly to the piano, she began a little song that seemed to bring her less of pain than thought. Maybe because the words were English and unheard to Kurd. “Oh ! that we two were Maying ;” the accompaniment beating, throbbing, like a glorious bird striking its wings against a cage, — wings that could soar and fly until, sun-blinded, it sank back to soar again.

He ceased his angry tramp about the salon

now, and sank listlessly into a chair, half-soothed by the rhythm of the song that quivered, besought, one tense pleading cry from the depths of a heart sore wounded.

“ Oh ! that we two lay sleeping
Under the quiet sod ;
With our bodies at rest
In the earth's cold breast,
And our souls at home with God,
And our souls at home with God.”

A choking sob, a chord that held the suffocation of long-pent-up tears, and the song was done.

Natalie Zàpròny, quietly gliding from beneath the portière, saw the girl, with eyes pleadingly uplifted as if piercing the fast-gathering darkness, not alone, as she quickly discovered ; for springing up confusedly from somewhere near the piano, rose the tall figure of an Uhlan. It needed no explanation, now, why the Baroness had changed her mind and requested that Joseffa, rather than Marie, should be her guest in the Herrn Gasse, and she kissed the girl softly, her face wet with tears, standing there in the gloaming.



CHAPTER V.

“To please woman is to coquette with the devil!” ejaculated de Tocqueville sententiously, shrugging his shoulders in vain effort to avert the stream of draught which rushed through the *entresol* of Palais Ostrande, to play with especial iciness on the one particular spot that held his person adjusted to indifferent equilibrium upon the crowded stairway; promising, just now, to clear much slower than the doom of dismal *migraine* would advance — a doom expectant which awakened this charitable fiat, causing the Dowager Princess of Bieberach to turn complacently her wizened smile upon him and remark that, for her part, she would pronounce him too old to do either; an assertion soliciting the retort that loss of taste was equally irremediable with loss of years, though, possibly, not so trying.

Being mutually reminded that whatever havoc years may have wrought with other faculties, that of speech was in no wise retarded, the idea seemed to impress itself that possibly, as enforced

juxtaposition of person was now helplessly unavoidable, and bade fair for some time to continue so, a proportionate degree of amiability would not be inappropriate.

So they fell to chatting quite comfortably, and with an elaborate show of interested politeness, remindful of the lingual dynamite at hand.

"Quite a charming night for the Princess to choose for her private theatricals," said she of Bieberach, shivering under her furs until the *poudre riz* upon her cheeks stood out like frost upon a window pane.

"Lovely, charming, quite akin to the emotions with which her talented genius will presently inspire us. Only for the life of me I cannot see why they should be called 'private' theatricals."

"How obtuse! why, because you are not expected to dispraise them, or anything else that is presented to you."

"*Migraine*, for instance, which is equally trying, though not without remedy. What will they soothe us with to-night?"

"Something lovely, I hear. A French play with no moral to speak of, but irreproachable toilettes."

"You enchant me! I would go miles on the coldest night to see lovely toilettes. I stood for hours, only this morning, before a shop window in

the Rothe Thurm Strasse, utterly bewildered by a row of dummies."

"Possibly they are all here to-night."

"Unhappily they won't be on the stage."

"Beware, you may be rash."

"I wonder how the sweet Princess feels about that poor *Bombe* man who is locked up for making fun of her in his paper?" This from a much-muffled bundle, with two smaller, but not less muffled bundles, about whom she seemed tenderly solicitous.

"Yes, *shocking* picture, was it not? The dear Princess sitting upon a divan directing a ballet of young countesses. I have told just every one I met how *horrible* I thought it."

Great twittering and subdued hilarity, interrupted by a very old gentleman with white moustaches *a la militaire*, asking excitedly if there was going to be a ballet.

"No, of course not. That is, well, some kind of a dance, I am not quite sure what, only that it is the moral of the play."

"Indeed!" disgustedly, "what moral?"

"As I said, it is the moral, and it will be your own fault if you don't deduce it, though what it is I have not the faintest idea. But," with freshened animation, "it is French, so each one can guess his own."

"Very proper and right, I am sure. It gives the mind something to do ; a feature quite often omitted in plays now-a-days."

"Oh ! how *dreadful*." This from a stout lady who stopped the procession, at the head of the landing, to make her announcement.

"The Princess had to send and *borrow* a child, at the last moment, to take the part of Madelaine's *chère enfant*."

"How outrageously provoking. Why, I thought it all arranged for one of her own."

"So it was, but the little thing got ill."

"Horrible ! How wretched, children can be *so* aggravating. Just at the last moment, of course."

"Nothing of the kind. The child had been under medical care for a week, and she was too busy rehearsing to know a word of it."

"How wretched not to tell her, putting things all awry in this fashion."

"*Poor Princess !*"

"*Poor Princess !*"

This from the bundles, for whom the electrifying intelligence had been intended.

"From a *ballet* to a baby, — all tastes provided for," announced de Tocqueville.

"Charming," echoed the Princess. "Now if the supper is only as comprehensive."

And the groups separated, to combine presently

in assuring their noble hostess that they anticipated just such a heavenly time as they always enjoyed when her artistic spirit deigned to elevate them.

An elevation that sought immediate assistance in plentiful libations of iced champagne, which the Princess Bieberach declared, on being served for the fourth time, was the only thing to prevent her taking her death from that frightful chilling she got on the stairway, while de Tocqueville nominated it an excellent antidote for *migraine*.

Just after the violins had laughed and glided through a Mozart overture, the Count, hearing a subdued murmur which his advanced wisdom refused to attribute to melodic admiration, turned toward a doorway to behold the *Staat entrée* of Natalie Zàpròny, whose beauty shone with a regal splendor that commanded, even from this jaded throng, a sensation of wonderment.

A robe of sheeny white, caught with jewelled butterflies, floated and swathed about her, while a necklace of Oriental splendor, which had been her mother's, swept her snowy bosom, coiling, snake fashion, low in the corsage to gleam and glitter clustering serpent's eyes, reflectant to the light of hers.

Royalty itself was in her train as she moved slowly towards a deep embrasured window that

held a luxurious *fauteuil*, placed throne-wise beneath a waving canopy of palms, which lent their flitting tracery of shadow to mellow waxen glare, reflecting pink from glowing curtains that shut out the night.

Zàpròny, lingering at a distance, conversing with a group of Magyar beauties, told, now and then, by fleeting glance, the spot that held his heart; causing de Tocqueville, who was eying them in furtive side-glance fashion, as was his wont, to melt and soften in the outline of a smile, that held more of quiet praise, content, than scorn or gay derision, his chief facial guests. Richly uniformed Hungarian officers glittered and gleamed beneath the crystal lustres with a brilliance rivaling them, showing in their beaming animation of countenance, strange contrast with the cold, unimpressible faces of beribboned diplomats engaging their attention, — faces that hid the triumph or the woes of nations with an equal phlegm. This envoy, chatting now so placidly complacent, knew not but to-morrow's sun might bring a crisis that would upheave his ministry, while just beyond, one greater still looked on with even more placidity, although he meant the loan, for which his wily fingers sought, to plunge his land in war and blood that might drown out its very place upon the map, or elevate to heights where thieving would be glorious victory, greater than arms.

Graceful Poles, misty in silk and lace, looked up with a world of enticing coquetry from under sweeping lashes that half-veiled eyes of a blue deep as the North Sea's dashing their shores; while dreamy, odalisque, breathing of the East and orange sunshine, were some beauties from King Milan's court, that waved and waved their fans with Spanish languor, speaking but rarely, and then with a smile that lit their faces with a sudden fire which sunset lends a heavy cloud o'ercharged with rain.

Viennese were there, gay, graceful Viennese, who flashed French coquetry from rich Italian lips, and smiled the smile of sunny skies, from out dark Austrian eyes, upon dark Austrian eyes bent tenderly above them.

The music swayed in undulating rhythm of a waltz, like luscious blossoms of pomegranate bent tossing to the winds, and servants rich in gala livery moved here and there, with great silver trays bearing tempting freight of dainty ices and rare champagne wines.

The silken curtain fluttered down upon the last scene of a French comedietta which the Princess Bieberach pronounced "quite French," in a tone that left no possible chance for cavil or gain-say.

"My dear Count, your nation certainly pos-

sesses greater ability in disguising, both in cookery and morals, that it serves to an admiring world, than our poor barbarian tongues may ever tell."

"*Merci*, Madame la Princesse," came de Tocqueville's suave reply. "It is merely the difference of the nude and naked in art; the one is inspiration, the other indecency."

"Mon cher Comte, such French humility! Really you are charming."

"Pardon, Madame; only to-night you told me that I was too old to amuse the devil."

"Ah! but I am young, at least more *ingénue* than he, and consequently not so difficult to entertain. Come, give me your arm. I wish to pay my compliments to the Ostrande upon her success."

"A most timely remembrance, if you have not bestowed them all upon me."

"Even were such the case, you imply small regard for my ingenuity. I can risk a great deal: indeed, few can risk more; but to refrain from stultifying a lot of amateur actresses, whether they have done well or not, is a matter of grave recklessness."

"Because of tender and easily wounded sensibilities?"

"Exactly. They are so liable to mistake tem-

per for feeling, that when people regret hurting them, they are mostly in a rage."

"*Mon Dieu*, Madame, I beg of you, let us fly to avert disaster," said the Count, gracefully offering his arm; and together, in sedate, becoming manner, these worthy friends gravely paraded down the suite to a distant salon, where their fair hostess held her court, still in the Parisian emanation which had incidentally concealed her broken heart a moment ago, behind rose-tinted footlights.

"Now what do you say to my complimentary resources?" queried the Bieberach lightly, as, this little necessity complied with, they swept onward to the supper room quite buoyant, within sight of virtue's sweet reward.

"It only confirms my estimate of your rare merit, that you never give way to the truth, except when you are tired."

"My dear Count, don't, pray don't parade your age. *I* never get tired until after supper." And with this remark began Chablis and oysters, likewise perfect equanimity of mind; an equanimity as fully shared by many younger participants, who allowed no eager expectations of the cotillon to shorten present enjoyment; and the hours had told the night well done, before another crush upon the stairway betokened a great feast at an end.

Natalie Zàpròny had danced the mazy figures with an exiled Prince as partner. An exiled Prince who met her once again, after the lapse of years, as gay as when in Stuttgart she had welcomed him an honored guest at court, celebrating a round of visits to the powers just preceding his enthronement; journeyings marked by a brilliance which betokened golden destiny.

No trace of past disaster found its vent in speech. He smiled, talked of the present, and seemed more gay than any there; but in his whitened hair and grief-marked face that bore the furrows of misfortune deep as sabre scars, there rested the traces of a power which scorches oftener than blesses: blinding on dizzy summits only to hurl backwards whence it came.

Though, for all this, painful emotions like to be awakened because of paths through which they led, flung no betokening shadow on her face, that beamed with quiet happiness as she crossed beneath the *porte cochère*, lit with its brazen standards all aglow, leaning upon Zàpròny's arm. A look of perfect and contented joy, resting there still as, some hours later, she welcomed her guests to *déjeuner*; a look which caused the Princess of Bieberach to recount a conversation with her hostess of the night previous, after first elaborately assuring Madame that she had come early

for the express purpose of resting before she began to eat, as fatigue always detracted more or less from her enjoyment.

“Natalie, my dear,” she began in her sharp, wheezy tone, “you look radiant, absolutely radiant. I said to Marie Ostrande last night, or rather this morning—I like to say something agreeable just before I leave to keep me in people’s minds—‘Marie, I have discovered the eighth wonder of the world, a woman whose husband is not only in love with her, but she with him.’”

“As she abominates her own, I don’t doubt but you left your desired impression,” said de Tocqueville, as Countess Zàpròny turned to welcome some newly arrived guests, after having patted the old Princess’s hand softly, in half-heeding fashion.

“I am sure of it, the more so as both her husband and his latest detestation were quite near at hand.”

“And what was her reply?” he queried, smiling grimly.

“Quite as I expected, that it took one husband to learn to appreciate another, and, maybe, when she had had two it might be the case with her.”

“What happened then?”

“I am sure I do not know. I kissed her good-night, as I hardly cared to wait and see.”

"Ah! here she comes now. *She* lived through it, at any rate; and in time for *déjeuner* too. Madame, permit me." This as the butler announced devotions.

Joseffa, bright and smiling, was seated next Waldemar Daggerhof, who had just that morning arrived at Hôtel Impérial, and was giving her the latest weather *résumé* of Stuttgart, nothing more notable having transpired.

How odd it seemed to look back upon that quiet, eventless life which held her past, all told not so full of living and excitement as these short two weeks.

"They have all been so kind to me,—Madame and the Count, and Count de Tocqueville too. He takes me to the theatre and concerts, only he seems more amused by my amusement than with the people on the stage."

"I do not doubt but it is more rarely foreign than what he sees there. He hardly appears to have retained much youthful impressibility."

"I am sure he seems perfectly abandoned to enjoyment now," returned Joseffa promptly, fully determined that her new-made friend should find staunch ally; and looking across the table to where he sat with Princess Bieberach, began, after a youthful fashion, to weave a tender heart romance of early love, long years of separation, then

consummation in old age. A heart romance so much like her own and Kurd's might be, that when *tomates Egyptiennes* came in the *menu* her eyes had grown almost too misty to distinguish them; an emotion which Waldemar had witnessed out of the corner of one eye, and remembering suddenly a scene just two weeks old, somehow, with possibly a superior analytical experience to aid him, combined the two; talking quite animatedly in his plate for the space of some moments, until her ready laugh told him the cloudlet passed and he raised his eyes from *patés* to be rewarded by her sweetest smile.

Countess Zàpròny seemed gayer, more confidently brilliant, than he had ever seen her. That indefinable shadow which had somehow crept in upon her almost unawares, and with faint bidding at their last meeting, was vanished, leaving, instead, a mood of joyousness to grow in place; a joyousness that seemed so calmly fixed in certainty as to defy all thought of ill; not recklessly, but with a grand superiority of mien which well became her.

"Is it true, Natalie, my dear?" queried the Princess Bieberach blandly, "that Prince Michael is going back to those people who chased him away?"

"The difficulty seems, Madame, that it was not

the people, as you put it, that chased him away, but outside power ; though no one can presage the result."

"Well, however it may have been brought about, the sweetness of his temper seems hardly improved," asserted the Bieberach in definite tone ; "for when I asked him if he was not delighted to get safely back from his savages to civilization, he said that the only distinguishing difference between them and us was lack of certain instances of longevity, rather in their favor."

"I trust you told him that such a small matter might not have troubled him had he but stayed a little longer?" queried a tiny, sharp-voiced lady from the depths of her salad.

"Nothing of the kind ; I told him that we realized the advantages of a good present over a great future, and went on extending ours indefinitely."

"His does not seem of much use to him, except to decorate evening parties ; though, Marie, I must say, in all truth, he added immensely to *yours*."

"Thanks," very disdainfully. "In London they run after such things, as menagerie creatures after curiosities ; but here we have so many that really —" and a flourish of her fan conveyed her meaning—it is needless to add hardly flattering.

"I spent the season in London last year, your Highness," chimed in Baroness von der Weide,

“and oh ! such an amusing thing happened. One lady gave just a charming garden party, and had a black king or something of the kind — very black indeed — so everybody came. Her most intimate friend gave the same kind of an entertainment the next afternoon — imagine her agony of mind to surpass this,— and what do you think she did ?”

“Got his wives,” put in quite unexpectedly a Hungarian lady with a deep voice and well-defined beard, whose attention, up to this point, had been solely claimed by her breakfast.

“Madame Szanto, if you had ever been in London you would hardly want to go the length of bringing savage women to increase the charm of feminine attraction, already so preponderating,” ejaculated old General de Luneville, feelingly.

“*Très magnifique, très magnifique.*” This from the Hungarian lady, who had gone back to her salad, alike totally unheeding and forgetful of surrounding curiosity.

“I am sure you must all leave off guessing, you would never be successful, she was such a bright woman,” continued the Baroness, in no wise disconcerted by recurrent interruptions. “She got a tattooed man, from heaven knows where, to come and recite.”

“About heaven knows what,” appended the

Hungarian lady, suddenly awakening from saladic enjoyment.

"That was of small consequence, it was *the* success of the season."

"*Will* he marry?" This from a meek-voiced lady of impressive proportions.

"Will who marry? — the tattooed man?"

"*Ciel*, what tattooed man? We were talking about Prince Michael. I have just been hanging upon your words. I *adore* him, so melancholy, so exalted, so — oh! everything."

"'So — oh! everything.' That entirely expresses the condition of his country, at any rate," testily interposed a hook-nosed old grandee, who was strongly suspected of having loaned the principality vast sums, which, unlike its ruler, had failed to return.

"No army, no army to speak of, the cause of the whole thing," retorted General von Schwangelstein, a rabid Bismarckian, and ex-commander-in-chief of the ducal Seidlitz-Pfefferingen armies.

"But, General, remember, they could not keep their troops under such strict surveillance as you did, not being able to review the whole army in an afternoon drive in the Promenade Platz," calmly corrected Princess Bieberach, exquisitely literal.

"As for the army, I hear they grew so afraid of dynamite —" began a young man with great

gusto, to be cut short by Count Szanto, an alleged *raconteur* with a very jolly voice, that was never heard until his inner promptings, being fully gratified, had, so to speak, forced it out. "Speaking of dynamite reminds me. Have you heard of a remarkable occurrence that bids fair to convulse the *Almanach de Gotha*?"

Several present had learned of remarkable occurrences that had gone still further, and succeeded in convulsing outside works. But being themselves more or less intimately affected, quite naturally refrained from faintest affirmation until this particular parallel should be more definitely indited.

"Yes, my friends, none other than the tragically delayed engagement of a Prince, who shall be nameless, and —"

"Oh! I am just positive you mean that *dear* Prince Michael," an interpolation from his meek-voiced enthusiast.

"Mon Dieu! Madame," put in de Tocqueville, "you would not expect a man to lose his principality and be in love at one and the same time; either is calamity sufficient."

"Maybe, if he has not yet been married, he suffers agonies through ignorance. Proceed, I beg of you, Count Szanto. Mon cher Comte, how can you have the heart to prolong this frenzy of curi-

osity into which our friend has plunged us." An appeal from the Princess Bieberach, who motioned her wine-glass replenished, possibly to fortify her patience.

"Yes, I heard the whole thing at the club, and as I was about to add, in regard to the dynamite —"

"Oh! tragic beyond anything, since — well, since —"

"The Prince's treasurer eloped with the taxes," put in the grandee, not wishing an untragic parallel selected.

"Eloped, who has eloped?" excitedly interrogated Countess Szanto. But as her husband never considered anything she might remark, the tragedy proceeded, quite unruffled.

"Since Princess Clothilde died on her wedding day."

"A most fortunate occurrence, for her, at any rate, as —"

"It seems the Prince had sent his most trusted envoy to a court, that shall also be nameless, to arrange for his marriage with a fair Princess. Just as they were about signing the contract, an equerry, covered with dust and foam, dashed into the courtyard."

"Whose courtyard?" from the slightly deaf old lady.

"A nameless Prince."

"How shocking. What is the nobility coming to? Has the Pope no —"

"The mother, fearing some ill, caught up the pen and fainted dead away. Thus staying proceedings, — fortunately, — I speak advisedly. For what despatches do you suppose he carried?"

"Prince Michael, and all that, I heard it at the club. But the dy —"

"Quite right of the Princess to await developments, so sweet and motherly."

"For my part, I consider a good —" began a lady, whose four daughters had been divided among the sons of a sugar refiner, upon equal division of the property. "For my —"

"How ridiculous!" swept in General de Luneville, with volatile scorn. "How ridiculous! to enthrone all these petty German princes, absolutely good for nothing."

"Not at all, my dear General. They do to marry to the English."

"Their divine right is —" orated General von Schwangelstein pompously.

"Listen, my friends, listen," cried the Countess Zàpròny animatedly. Holding aloft a bit of crested parchment, bearing intimately upon the subject, and one for some moments engaging her absorbed attention with a contradictory diplomat

so thoroughly as to escape its particularly exquisite application under existing circumstances. "Listen, I beg of you. How very delightful:—

"MADAME, — I am petitioned to reascend my throne, and have just acquiesced to the pleadings of my people's envoys. The Powers make concessions and all is well.

"This will explain my detention from your charming *déjeuner* this morning. MICHAEL.'

"The *dear* Prince, I knew things would be as they should."

"Providence was *forced* to interfere. How chagrined that wretched woman must feel regarding her daughter?"

"My dear Count, pray tell us the remainder of your charming story about Prince Michael."

"Pardon, Madame. It is neither my story nor about Prince Michael," with wonderful promptitude.

"Who was it, then? Tell us at least how the story ended?"

"Oh!" with slightly less promptitude. "The Prince — was dead."

"Indeed!" returned the Princess Bieberach, dryly, "the wonder is that we are not the same."



CHAPTER VI.

"CIEL," and, with a little gesture of comical dismay the Countess Zàpròny pushed aside a salver piled high with notes and invitations crested and monogramed, leaves in the whirl of fashion, betokening the tide of the wind; distinguishing in this instance their fair recipient with such unbounded prodigality as to demand an endurance even greater than she could present; although the energy which inspired her progress through the gay round of dissipation was a standard theme of envy with her intimate circle, that emulated, oftenest ineffectually, the perfect elasticity prompted by her Muscovite physique.

"*Ciel*," and she leaned back languidly, holding the Sèvres chocolate shell listlessly, forgetful of its inviting contents, as she watched the sunshine faintly sifting through Moorish lattice-work which screened the windows of her boudoir, making trembling mosaic along Eastern hangings, heavy with their own richness and the breath of sandal woods; creeping in flitting, furtive fashion

across the crystal blossoms that entwined Venetian mirrors, to glint more lingeringly upon a Florentine enshrinement which held the portrait of her husband in its argent arabesque; a point that stayed her gaze as lingeringly, until the heavy portière was swung aside with gay "*Bon jour*" and de Tocqueville stood upon the threshold.

"*Entrez, entrez!* How opportune! Just in time to prevent my abandon to a desolation of despair. What am I to do? Look! at least forty cards for forty *déjeuners, dîners*, and receptions. Come, tell me those demanding my attention first," and she smilingly pushed the salver towards him, sinking back to her comfortable pose and toying idly with her tiny spoon; while he, always obedient to her bidding, gravely adjusted his glass, tossed the cards upon a low divan, and proceeded to assort them with a play of feature which for some moments held the Countess highly entertained, an entertainment presently accentuated by a gay peal of laughter.

"Why, why do you not give play to that delightful freedom of facial gesture oftener? It would plunge the most dismal soirée into hilarity, I am positively sure."

"Not at all, *ma chère* Natalie. One can say what one means, but never look it; to society

appearance, not breath, conveys meaning. Have you desire to thrust me from this earthly paradise?"

"If you share my delight in its enjoyment, even in a small degree, far be it from my intention."

"And you do enjoy it, to its fullest?" he asked, presently, having for some moments been plunged in thought deeper than her query could well warrant.

"Enjoy it? I seem to fly in an atmosphere as full with gayety and pleasure as sunbeams thick with dancing gold dust."

"Your happiness is full; you realize all that your heart can wish?"

"Yes," she said, after a little silence, and falling into his greater earnestness of tone. "Yes; what could a life imagine more than mine achieves? Health, luxury, splendor, friends unbounded; and, best of all, the truest devotion that a noble heart can give."

"You can spare your old friend for a little, then, can you not?" he asked, presently, an odd hesitation in his voice, always so nervously, sharply prompt.

"Spare you?" she cried, the look of gratified exaltation fleeing suddenly from her countenance, to be replaced by one of half-expectant terror, then, as suddenly, to fade away in one of her

rare smiles; but her fingers still twitched nervously at the heavy cords confining her morning robe. "Oh! why will you needlessly alarm me again with your wild African projects? You do not need to go. Look what changing kaleidoscopic sensation society offers, abundantly more varying and exciting than the savages could possibly afford you. Come, come, let us talk of what the day holds for us, not of wild journeyings."

"This is hardly a willingly undertaken one, my dear," he said, with such gentleness that her eyes swam suddenly in a mist of tears, awakened, possibly, more by the worn look which crept upon his features, giving them an aged, pinched expression, than by the tone conveying them.

"No — you cannot mean — Spain?" and her lips formed themselves unwillingly, almost rigidly to the query, leaving her face even more livid and drawn than his momentarily had been.

"No, no," he interrupted hastily in a relieved manner, as if glad to spare her other pain than held in that his next words would convey; sinking his voice almost to a whisper when he gave them utterance: "No, not Spain — not Africa — but farther still."

For an instant she was silent; the sentence seemed to convey no meaning to a brain momentarily stunned by half-formed fear, to leave it blank, impressionless.

"Yes, farther still," he repeated softly, compassionately, as if to shield as long as possible the pain this would bring to her.

"My God! can you mean? —" came gaspingly from her rigid lips, which refused to utter that last poignant, pregnant word.

"I mean — death," he said, quite calmly, almost coldly now, but half-restrainedly, to rob her of the wounding even a second's space.

She made no sound, except a moan, such as bears out the fluttering breath when a dagger blade pierces the heart's depth; then she staggered slowly, blindly, groping with hands that sought convulsively the fastening of the lattice woodwork, and flung wide the casement, letting in a blast of icy winter and a flood of glittering sunshine.

Uncertainly she leaned her head against the stone-wrought *fleurs de lis* that bloomed along the casement. The street below sent up a noisy echo, the whirr of quickly passing wheels and blur of many voices. Now a laugh, a shrill, penetrating laugh, made her shiver convulsively and grasp at the heavy hangings that swayed in her tense hold.

She raised her eyes half-wonderingly into the smiling sky, passed one hand lightly along a fretted gargoyle; then, putting out her arms wildly as if to ward off a blow, sank forward upon a

divan, thence to the floor, the red-gold of her hair escaping its fastenings, to coil and glitter among the cushions. A long, dry, shuddering sob, and she raised a questioning face that held no longer the self-reliant joy and hope, the gay, half-reckless confidence of one short hour ago.

"To leave me alone," she pondered slowly, as if trying to impress the meed of grief dealt to her. Then, springing up suddenly she cried, "Oh! my friend, you cannot mean that! It is some gloomy foreboding, some horrible phantasie, which has fastened itself upon you, simulating reality until you yourself believe it. You are well, strong, and promise years of life," she cried excitedly, laughing with a laughter more harrowing than tears; "you will live years, years longer than I—tell me so!" and she put both hands upon his head, pushing back the whitened hair from off his face, until their eyes met, and shuddering she sank at his feet.

"Natalie, Natalie, listen! Do not hasten my end by this anguish, if you wish to hold me. God knows I long to shield you—and will," he said, firmly, fixedly determinate, setting his teeth hard together and drawing a quick breath that quivered in his nostrils. "I have dreaded this, dreaded with a terror to which death is joy, to tell you of the fate awaiting me. Only yesterday my valet

found me senseless from an attack, of late recurrent, that the greatest doctors of Vienna tell me comes from a heart almost at its last. How odd," he went on, with half-sarcastic irony, "that I, I of all others, should get my death-blow from my heart, a thing I thought had died a natural death these forty years. Listen, child, take courage. The worst may come years hence — years which may hold a freedom to make me no longer necessary; but of a certainty, so say the doctors, those wise fools who only know what we must learn to tell them, that any shock, any sudden jar, will stop the throb which now sometimes comes painfully; and to avert the danger of leaving you unprepared, I risk what you so dearly would avert."

His words came slower and more slowly until they ceased, and looking up she saw great drops of sweat stand bead-like on his forehead and a grayish pallor lining downward from the set corners of his firm-shut mouth.

Her shivering ceased, she choked her dry sobs back, and caught his hands in both her own, kneeling thus some moments silently.

It was he who broke this silence first. "Natalie, child, you have no need for fear; all will be well. He can never again trouble you. For once, those doctors have said rightly."

“But the agony of fear that sometimes creeps upon me in the night, an agony that choral, nothing will drown from my sight. That hideous spectre, creeping, creeping out of the darkness, with eyes that burn and burn like living coals into my brain. Sometimes I hear him call me, ‘Natalie, Natalie;’ so cold and chill the words ring out that I must bury my face in the hangings of the bed, else I would shriek aloud. Then daylight comes, I arise, laugh at my folly and straightway forget it, only with each repetition the fear sears deeper, deeper, until, perhaps, my heart, not yours, will cease to beat the first.”

“That is merely the result of all this excitement. You will be well over it when Lent once begins and you find quiet and rest at Regolstein.”

“Regolstein!” she iterated, shuddering, “Regolstein! The falling mirror which held both your pictures was there, the dreams that haunt me most are there, where I should be the happiest. Oh! why do I live to bring a curse to those who mean me best.”

“Do not distress yourself so, Natalie; I cannot bear it. If you would prolong my life bear up and show that nerve which has been steel in far more dreadful anticipation. We must talk quietly, calmly, arranging all things, so that, should I die to-night or twenty years from now, all will be well.”

His words had their effect. She rose up, slowly, painfully, as if the vigor of her youthful frame had been felled by one savage, cruel blow that swept the light from out her life, leaving instead a hopeless dread which might at any time prove but the augur of a doom.

Uncertainly her fingers wove the tawny mass about her head. Mechanically she straightened the loose, sweeping tresses, confining them with golden pins; then, smoothing her disordered draperies, she quietly sank into the chair which one short hour ago had held her radiant with a life that zoned a world, — the world of joy sure and protected.

"I am ready," she began, in a slow, measured, hopeless way, "to do just as you bid. You must forgive a selfishness that seems inhuman, but I am only a woman whose heart can hold but one, or I would not be so slow to deem your life dear — but for the gift of its protection." A moment's space told silence, then she began vehemently, "No, no, do not regret my plight; it was I who brought it on myself. You have no ground for remorse, none. Let it drop. There is no danger but in the wild imaginings of a selfish woman who has not thought for others that does not centre in herself, no heart beyond her joy.

"If the worst comes to the worst, leave me alone to receive disaster born of my own will, which can

receive no doom too deep for its deserts. It makes me strong, man, to think that I am *alone*, dependent on my own resources to face out the worst; it makes me gifted with a cunning which before I never held. I feel it now, strong enough to face the worst and vanquish." She had risen and was pacing the room quickly, rapidly, clasping her hands tightly, to unclasp them showing bloody imprint where the nails had bit into the tender flesh. Then, before he could steady her, she had swayed forward, senseless at his feet. Tenderly he placed his arm about her, smiling grimly one of his slow, satiric smiles when he found himself too weak to lift her.

With a gasp, half a sob, she raised her eyelids slowly, looked uncertainly about her, and, realizing all, began to weep softly. De Tocqueville left her thus, confident that she would be the better for it presently, and going to the window, gazed grimly down at the virile life surging and ebbing in the great city's artery beneath, still smiling grimly at all the power powerless to grant one atom more of living; when her light touch upon his arm told him that she was ready for his bidding, a bidding which must be the last, when hope had always told him that he would ever stand between her and a dreadful possibility of woe that would crush out her very life, or, bitterer still, all that made its living joy.

"In those dreadful days, when all the women of the court jeered at me covertly, a deserted wife, and all the men seemed fraught, as their nobility of instinct dictates, with the idea that a wife forsaken is a wife forsaking, then I was strong. Their very looks so seared my heart as to encase it in a panoply wrought of its own woes. Then, I had none to turn to; you were not yet there. It cannot be that, having once ceased to bear it through alone my lesson is forgot. It must be that life — living, loving, joyful life — has made me weak at bare anticipation of its loss, a loss phantasmal, impossible. As you have said, the doctors, for once, are wise."

"Of course they are," he added quickly, with pacifying assurance. "Right beyond all chance or possibility of doubt. He is dead. Dead to the world, and that means dead to life."

"Yes, that means dead to life," she echoed, shivering.

"When your visit to de Saignon wrought the miracle of rescuing his small manliness, though not as your prayers bade; when in endeavoring to save a wretch you brought upon him a just punishment that fell below his meeding; — then you were morally free to cast off even the remembrance of him, as he had cast off your heart. I look with wonder now upon a nature, nobly generous and compassion-

ate as yours, nursing him so long and tenderly, fleeing southward when danger threatened him ; for you forgot yourself, and that too with his voice calling ever ceaselessly, not your name, but another's. Then, even your calm, grand, scornful pity, which sought to save his life, to fling it back to both, tried me beyond all patience. Do you remember that night," he asked grimly, "when I was ready to stay him, once and for all, from his endless pratings? Would he had gotten those drops you dashed from my hand, and now we would not be recking what loomed beyond. *Allons !* we grow tragic because of remembrance. We have a maniac where I should have left a corpse. The one is harmless as the other."

"When you were last in Spain, what did the brothers of the order say that have his charge? "

"That the wound had crushed upon his brain in such a fashion, that to dream of its regaining a normal state was madness great as his."

"And that they had had many cases more —" she prompted, as in an oft-told story.

"Yes, as in many cases more, when only death relieved the ravings of vacant minds, more lucid, perhaps, just before the quiet, but never clear, or bearing faintest evidence to warrant a release."

"Then watchfulness, iron doors, even a lost semblance of himself, make safety trebly sure. You say that he is changed? "

“Yes, changed so that even I, who, unhappily, knew him quite too intimately for the good of my estates, must needs have him pointed out by the brother who served my guide. Groping there among the straw like some wild beast, and calling for and cursing her by turn. They know no name but that we gave them. He mutters and snarls until all our acumen could never get it straight, not taking into consideration the fact that their simple ignorance is so far cut off from all the world that even a whisper of its turmoil never finds them. Yet, to make assurance still more sure :— Here is a paper ; it contains a secret which affects the honor of our house, and should a fear, impossible of realization, come to pass, then open it, and you will find a might to wield which will dash from your life the bitterness that would assail it. If this need never come, or be removed, destroy the paper with unbroken seal, but guard it until then. Yes, you are safe. This is all folly to dream of other result. Now, dry your eyes, think only of your happiness, and if it adds somewhat to know that I am with you, why I will stay. But do not let us speak of—Africa again, because, really, I begin to fear that that particular part of my heart which I fondly believed encysted, or broken from too hard usage, has begun to live again ; maybe on the principle that when one eye

is blinded the other grows stronger. Come, let us look over these invitations," he proposed in the most matter-of-fact way imaginable, proceeding slowly across the room to close the window, and when he had returned she had so far mastered all the unstrung threads of her emotion as to present an almost quiet face to his oft-recurrent, quick, questioning glance. For his sake listening, though sometimes it seemed but well-veiled pretence, to the names and fêtes he read off quite composedly, as if their conversation had been all along of what they held or did not hold in store.

Some hours later Prince Daggerhof, now also in Vienna, crossed the marble, tessellated *entresol* of a great *palais* aglow with lights and music that gleamed through the night, shedding in multiplied lustre and tone-ray in this ante-room upon the cold white busts resting on snowy pedestals which held aloft their semblance of a beauty vanished. Slowly he went from one to the other, hat in hand, as he paid a silent homage to some sculptured faces, faces that had beamed on him in years gone by, and lips that had lost curve in smile, now shut from sight and speech beneath a coffin lid below the altar of the Augustines.

He turned abruptly, sighing, to catch sight of Natalie Zàpròny's smiling countenance and out-stretched hand, that bade him welcome, a welcome

warmly echoed by her husband, upon whose arm she leaned.

"We have our warmest congratulations to add to greeting," was her smiling announcement. "You have aided Prince Michael nobly, and I trust he rests the more securely on his throne for this grand vindication."

"I have but just left him," came the equally smiling rejoinder, "perfectly embarricaded in a mass of flowers, cards, and telegraphic congratulations; his ante-room crowded to suffocation with ardent admirers awaiting access to his presence."

"All to tell him, doubtless, as they did one Charles the Second of England, that they had been so eagerly awaiting his re-accession as to make him almost think it entirely his own fault that such a step was rendered necessary," put in Zàpròny, joining in the Prince's tone of mood.

"Exactly; and only yesterday these same enthusiasts were ready, like a pack of wolves in the white steppes, to tear his heart out and feast through his woe," returned the other grimly, causing a shudder to creep upon the Countess, which her husband remarking, chided him for awakening.

"You speak only the truth, *mon prince*, and need no forgiveness," she said, when he would beg her pardon; "I turned but a moment to the mem-

ory that all pictures bear a reverse, and most happy is he who can hold that reverse forever past and done, as with Prince Michael is, I trust, the case." Though for all this she clung still closer to her husband, as they ascended the grand stairway, heavy with odor of rare exotics and waving wilderness of fronding palm above the gleam of marble.

As they reached the landing Prince Daggerhof sighed and turned to take a final, lingering glance at those silent faces below him, wondering, as silently, if the reverse of his picture had not now crept on, an age which held remembrance instead of hope, existence instead of living. But presently the crash of music, the misty glimpse of swaying, animated youth and life about him, lost vain rememberings in brilliant repartee; from none more brilliant than Natalie Zàpròny, until he was remindful of her mother, Cleopatra Varasov, and her gay rejoinder that had held at bay a barbed-tongued court.—Natalie, radiantly beautiful as she swept through the splendid maze of the *cotillion*, wrapped in her husband's arms. The voice of the violins sighing and bending above them, filling the air as with perfume of roses, banishing care and the memory of sorrow, as a mist swept away by the sunlight.



CHAPTER VII.

JOSEFFA was, together with the Princess of Bieberach, being solemnly bowled over the courtyard stones of the Burg to church. Not with the giddy flourish which distinguished Her Highness's equipage in its more worldly progressions, but a dignified, even majestic leisure that presaged a brisk gallop homeward, when all had been properly ended, after the fashion of a military funeral; for Her Highness's coachman possessed an intellectual sense of the proprieties, echoing after a faint fashion, as is the wont of servicees, the breeding of his servitor; while with an inherited and more profound propriety, the Princess herself was holding a missal before her mouth for the purpose of concealing an alarming series of yawns, which she declared, with the same propriety, to be brought about by the fearful freshness of the air at an hour, to her, designatable only as the dawn of the early martyrs.

“But one must, my dear — and you will learn it more and more disagreeably as the time goes by—

one must make sacrifices to keep abreast of the times, and once in a way I come to the ten o'clock sermon, which no doubt *you* will enjoy, to find out what has been added to or pruned from my personal faith since last I was there. For, in this wretched age politics and religion vie with each other in jumping about, though in all respect I must say that, in our circles, the latter is not nearly so active as the former, which unhappily cannot always be under our control."

Joseffa murmured by way of an assent, possibly alleviating, that the music was always very beautiful.

"Yes, it is," rather abstractedly; "at half-past twelve you shall drive around with me to enjoy it."

"But it begins at eleven," interposed her hearer with increasing surprise in the interrogation, which had, by its close, conveyed her former meaning to the Princess, not given, like many people of her age, to particularly definating youthful queries.

"Ah! you mean the church music; possibly it is, to some. Indeed, now that you mention it, I remember hearing foreigners praise it; but I never enjoy music in the dark, or toilettes, or anything, not being able to see; though at the *Musik Verein* the concert is charming. They give a symphony or something; I am sure it will

be amusing; one's friends always drop in. Speaking of friends, recalls to me that Count de Tocqueville is looking far from well. Have you noticed, my dear? He looks, — well, really more decrepit than Prince Daggerhof, who is a good ten years older. *Ciel!* I am frightened myself. It cannot be that he is what impolite people call *failing*."

"Madame," cried Joseffa in wide-eyed astonishment mingled with genuine concern, "can it be that Monsieur le Comte is ill?"

"Oh! hardly that, my dear; I am sorry to have startled you. I should have said growing, like all human *bric-à-brac*, needful of a little patching and mending. Perhaps he will go off to some baths or other, and get done up in mud and hotel bills until he is quite as good as new. And speaking of patching reminds me; a little piece of advice, my dear, which I only give to those possessing my especial favor. Patching called it to mind. But first tell me, do you think I look well, not at all pinched, I mean, more than at the beginning of the season? Of course you could never tell from my complexion, Jeanette does me up so charmingly."

"Madame always looks charming," summoning to her aid a tone that augured well for her own future success in those circles in which her aged friend glimmered on.

“Ah! you saucy child,” tapping her cheek with one kidded claw. “Now you *shall* know; it may prove helpful when you get married, as of course all girls do, sooner or later. I was very late myself, being quite plain — though I have improved — and having no *dot* but my tongue. When I got married, I foresaw a necessity which very few do, and I have, I feel, saved the happiness of some noble houses by it. Men never admire their *own* wives after they begin to grow old, unless, indeed, they themselves grow blind. And the first place a woman is likely to show her age is, from here to here,” tapping Joseffa’s neck below one pink ear, then the soft ruffle at her throat; “and as Bieberach was *very* old himself, I knew it more necessary than ever to keep preternaturally young; so, whenever he wanted to give me jewels, I always chose necklaces, until I had at least twenty. Dear old man! *how* he used to laugh at what he called my *fancy*. But my neck is *so* long, and with them *all* on, I could wear the fullest kind of toilette with impunity. Heaven gave me my eyes, Jeannette my complexion, and my husband my neck. But *ciel!* here we are at the Palace. What a mob! They must have published a good programme yesterday. Now, my dear,” as she alighted with majestic deliberation, “follow me quite closely,

and carry yourself as I do ; and may the sermon do you good, though, even if it does not, I feel that your morning has not gone unimproved."

With this she began the ascent of the grand stairway *des Ambassadeurs*, her head well erect and sombre train sweeping grandly after. Joseffa following, past the imperial guards aglitter in uniforms of red and white and gold with shining lictors, across the parquet floor of the ante-room and through the glazed door, swept wide ajar by a footman in gorgeous livery, into the presence of the King of kings.

But here, in the soft glimmer of a mezzo-twilight, so dear to the brushes of the old Italian masters, there crept a feeling of quiet peace into her heart that was not often there — a peace that lent the hope all would be well ; yielding a restful sense of content, abstraction, rather than prayer, which trembled on her lips unknowingly.

The sermon fell unheeded. She saw the sunshine sifting in through the one great, lanced window in a shower of color that trailed and floated on, like flowers upon a lake of shadow, shadow blossoming in its depths about the altar in rifting banks of white azaleas, which crept up, up in curves of snow until they met their flashing counterparts flooding through oak-groined framing.

The silver angels above the tabernacle gleamed faintly as their wings touched in a haze of rose and amber. The sweep of glazed galleries, on either side, lost themselves in high-reaching, trembling gloom that held one instant preciously a jewel of light, to drop it down, down, through the reflectant shadow.

Candles, in great silver candelabra, ranged a stately array on either side of the high altar, flickering and gleaming aloft in answer to the gold-clasped tapers before the Emperor's gallery, indistinct, shadowy; while in quaint, shield-like sconces, discolored, brazen, waxen rays, trembling, irregular, set two and two, brought out the darkness.

Above, in the topmost gallery, hidden but for a few stray gleamings, the violins were sighing out the prelude to the *Kyrie*. A clear, sweet voice, a boy's throbbing, thrilling soprano, crept, then clove, through the darkness; up through the flowers of light, lost in the shadow, trembled and fell like a heart pleading mercy withheld not. The chorus bearing, supporting, on wings of melody higher and higher, until at last it burst at the very gate of heaven, in a wild, ecstatic *Gloria*.

A fanfare of trumpets, and the statuesque guards, glowing and golden, with drawn swords presented,

wheeled right about face, to be relieved by others as stately.

Then the organ and chorus fused with the mighty melody of the orchestra, floating beneath a rushing and trembling arpeggii of harp strings, that fluttered and quivered until the air seemed filled with a haze of glorified splendor, like sunshine sudden and blinding bursting on shadow.

Again the sweet, wistful tones breathed out the *Agnus Dei's* pleading, another wave-burst of sound, and the *missa* was ended.

"My dear," came from the Princess Bieberach tragically, "my feet have gone to sleep; give me your arm, I beg." And thus abjured, Joseffa assisted Madame to arise, awakened quite summarily from a dream of Kurd's blue eyes, dark and pleading; a dream which vanished to leave tear-drops trembling full on her lashes; tear-drops still faintly visible when Count de Tocqueville met them, quite unexpectedly, descending the stairway.

"Ah! Count, I have just been praying for you with such fervor that both my feet went to sleep."

"Madame, you fill me with distraction to think that I have been the cause of such inconvenience, though perhaps it was the unusualness of the event, equally with the fervor, that caused your discomfort."

"Count, Count ! Is it possible that I hear you voicing such sentiment in the presence of a sweet young creature whose mentor I have quite constituted myself. If you wish to accompany us in our enjoyment, you must behave differently."

"It depends vastly upon where that enjoyment leads before I can promise any accomplishment."

"To the *Musik Verein*."

"*Mon Dieu*, when I stay away from church simply because my nerves will not bear the noise."

"You seem to sit out the *cotillions* charmingly."

"But dance music is only hilarious noise."

"Indeed, it is well that your nerves and tastes are so delicately balanced ; now to me, one is just as bad as the other. But I embrace both, on the principle that the right is always the disagreeable."

"Which in this instance I intend entirely to disprove," he said gallantly, entering the carriage after them and waving his own coupé the homeward signal.

But his nerves were spared a prolonged siege of martyrdom that morning, the Princess finding one movement of a symphony amply sufficient for further diversion in fields of melody. There being, as she announced disappointedly, no one present with whom she cared at all to converse, except some stupid creatures who would never talk at a

concert, though for the life of her she could not understand why, for conversation, from the accepted point of view, gained by accompanying commotion, which it politely strove to excel, a gentle impetus, a fictitious energy, bordering almost upon animation. An animation not at all fictitious, which lent her tone, when, with thoughts of *déjeuner*, she ordered "Home" to the footman, as he closed the carriage door upon her friends' adieu under the glazed *porte cochère* in Palais Zàpròny court-yard.

An animation finding no lodgment in Joseffa's sad little face from like awakening prospect, for she had got to thinking of Kurd again, and de Tocqueville, having once before that morning seen faint signs of what he was pleased to denominate *mal du pays*, asked her to drive with him shortly to Schönbrunn; imagining a glimpse of the old palace gardens might recall a brightness now incontinently lacking, though he laughed to himself grimly, as they rolled thitherward, at what he nominated privately his *fête bourgeoise*.

The sunshine swept down the long Mariahilfer Strasse, bringing into full silhouette the beautiful bridge with its carven portal, while just beyond, the palace, bearing long rows of fret-wrought windows, blinking, fiery, lay drowsing amidst a garden where naked, glistening branches, trim cut and lacing overhead, formed net-like trceries, shim-

mering and vibrant against the fields of far-off, limpid blue, which smiled down tenderly upon them with brightest Austrian smile. During the drive, with a forethought rare to him, he had held her in conversation on things about them, or themes quite as foreign to her distant home, until, to his surprise — after they had sent the carriage on towards the Gloriette it was, and were slowly wending down the clipped *allée* which led to the menagerie — she announced quite frankly and in suavest tones that, for her part, she considered Vienna far preferable, as a place of residence, to Stuttgart. Clearly, her mournful condition must be due to an attachment other than of a purely local nature.

“The palaces, for instance,” he began categorically.

“Oh! far finer. Do look at those pea-fowls chasing each other across the lawn.”

De. Tocqueville, thus exclamatorily diverted, followed the direction of her eyes and was resultantly so lost in thought of a philosophic turn as to forget for some moments their bent of conversation.

A gay bird, clumsily ambling on, no sooner raised aloft in pride the fan-like glory of its jewelled plumage, than suddenly a rush, a whirl, kaleidoscopic flashings showing varied tint, and an envious birdling had wrought havoc with its

radiance, to be in turn, and in like fashion rendered remorseful, until some, from long enjoyment of each others' company, looked sadly flayed, although the skeletonian remnant of their pride fluttered as vainly as ever to the chilly breeze.

Had the Princess of Bieberach been present, he would at once, conversationally and unrestrainedly have pronounced them quite strongly remindful of society ladies enjoying themselves, barring indeed a slight inconstancy, inasmuch as many were more signally failing in characterial possessions than the raggedest bird of the lot.

As it was, he merely thought it, to record for future pleasurable use, and turning to Joseffa, asked if she found higher enjoyment in living than artistic creation. Joseffa, hardly certain, remembered with vague phrasial ambiguity a group or two at Rosenstein which had struck her fancy.

"Of course, of course, the Juno reclining is one of the superbest creations of an artist's inspiration; classic drapery, regal pose; naturally you class that treasure of the collection among your artistic admirations."

Joseffa haltingly acknowledged that she had not observed it.

"Not observed it! Why, when were you there?"

"Only lately; we *all* went with Fräulein Putz,

our governess, you know, who showed us everything. That is, the other girls saw everything; I was with my cousin Kurd, for a part of the time."

"Ah! I see, not so energetic a guide as the Fräulein, possibly. You refer to that long-legged, rather plain young Uhlan, I suppose, von Palm?"

"I mean my cousin, the Second Lieutenant Kurd von Palm, whom I think very handsome; his eyes are the most—I mean—blue." Beginning with great dignity to end with great confusion.

"Ah! I see," returned de Tocqueville, quite placidly, "naturally your point of view as to masculine beauty would differ with mine, though doubtless liable to change as the years progress." Forthwith proceeding, as placidly, to congratulate himself that her *mal du pays* was likely of a character more curable by method of absence than otherwise, congratulation broken in upon quite suddenly.

"I shall always consider him as worthy of my admiration as I now do, no matter if a cannon goes off under him and leaves him striped red and black across the face, like a Würtemberg flag, or General von Schwafelstein."

"Of course you will, my dear, of course you will, and it is quite sweet and ladylike of you to say so. I admire the spirit extremely, I am sure.

In war times it might prove a national benefaction if more liberally evinced."

"I deem you very unkind, Monsieur le Comte de Tocqueville: I may be too young to understand a great deal, but a veiled sneer can hardly be placed in the category. I think we had better take the carriage for home," and Joseffa lifted her head with a dignity even more imperial than that assumed by Princess Bieberach when sailing into the court chapel. Only she allowed herself a luxury, to Princess Bieberach unallowable under any circumstances. Two tears trembled on her lashes, to make a flashing journey adown her rose-flushed cheeks.

"Forgive me, my dear, forgive me," he pleaded, in a tone quite unused by him for some decades, a tone, though, to some extent dedicated to his own lamentable helplessness, there in the midst of a staring *bourgeoisie*, multitudinous animals, which for the moment seemed gifted with equal curiosity, and a sunshine absolutely spring-like in its gleamings. For a space he actually forgot that his original intention of discovering her maidenly inclinations had been gratified to the fullest; being rendered too anxious by the fear that her maidenly agitation, once let loose, might play with a fluvial abundance equal to the fountains which gave their present pleasure jaunt its cognomen.

But he found in this instance, as he had once or twice been surprised to find before, that Joseffa, though to a certain point quite in accord with young ladyish acceptance, was, beyond it, something more womanly than many of them ever attain.

Her eyes were quite dry now, and she quietly insisted that her preference was to return home at once, subject, of course, to his decision, which speech took with it such a tone of conciliatory agedness and necessitous veneration, that he wondered, quite sincerely, if she stood at all in his debt.

"No, no my child," with appropriate patriarchy, "I could not think of such a thing. We will proceed at once to the Gloriette before returning homeward. It would be an everlasting reproach if you went back to Fräulein Putz and —" being about to add Kurd, but opportunely substituting "the rest of them, without seeing Vienna from the Gloriette. They say it was built by Maria Theresa, who hated the city and came here to get away from it. Though why she should undertake an edifice from which one gets more of the town than if one were in it, I could never reconcile with the tradition." Thus historically righted, they slowly ascended the stairway leading to their snowy destination, which rose, pale and sepulchral,

against the fading east. The high tree-tops with their thick, waving branches had caught the sun's late rays aslant, to hold as arrows in a quiver, shooting now and then a long slim shaft of gladdening light far out on russet turf-swells, marble vases, gleaming statues, fountain spray tossing chill and pale in the shadow. Far away, beneath a cloud of misty vapor, rose the great city, grand, impressive, repellant, like a tomb holding secrets of ages, and bearing warning to those who with eager carelessness would venture intrusion.

St. Stephan's tower soared in the night mist creeping out from the eastward, grand and majestic.

Mighty with calm in the gloaming lay Vienna, while trembling out on the sea of quiet pealed the church bells; a flight of crows sailing homeward caught up the echo of tones softly jangled, to caw away westward. Dropping her eyes from them to her companion sitting beside her, she saw with affright that his head had fallen forward upon the balustrade railing, while a grayish pallor shone in his face, his eyes wide open, but sightless, and not a quiver of breath stirring his nostrils.

She shrieked, but no one heard; the gay groups had moved farther down on the broad terrace to leave her there alone, helpless. Hardly recking what to do in her terror, she chafed his hands,

then, bethinking herself presently of her crystal vinaigrette, which, as she now remembered tearfully, he had given her, bathed his forehead in eau de Cologne, and smoothed back his hair that the cold air might better play about his temples, having first rested his head on her shoulder.

Directly, a long, fluttering gasp, then another, and his eyes closed heavily, to open with a look of grateful, though dazed recognition. He motioned her feebly to reach for a phial in the breast of his greatcoat. Touching it to his lips he grew presently better. Then, with an effort, resumed his position, beginning, brokenly at first, to thank her and gravely regret the fright he had given, the trouble he had unhappily caused her. "O! Monsieur de Tocqueville, it was nothing, nothing at all, I assure you. I am only too thankful to hear your voice again. I was so frightened just now when you failed to answer me. I thought maybe —"

"Maybe I was dead," he said, quite calmly,

"I am sure I do not know exactly what I thought, only I clearly remembered that I had behaved very petulantly and ungratefully to you; and I hope you will forgive me as heartily as I am sorry. For you are so kind and good to me, Monsieur, and I am really very thankful to you, and fond of you, though I am afraid you never thought so

from my behavior, especially this afternoon ;” and raising his hand she touched it lightly to her lips, then, half-confused at her own impulsiveness, drew her furs closely about her, and standing before him asked if he felt sufficiently recovered for her to leave him to signal the footman.

“No, not yet ; that is, I am much better now, quite well indeed ; the little indisposition has passed entirely. But sit down here again, I have something to say to you.” Looking into his eyes she saw a mist resting there, like the mist hanging over the city.

“It is I who should beg forgiveness, for it was very brutal of me to attack your feelings ; only with me, child, observation and experience have brought so much that is false and changeful, that I looked upon you as like the rest, of the same clay, as it were. So let us forget it all, and as I am an old man, and not likely to live long enough to betray any one’s secrets, suppose you tell me yours. Perhaps I can help you before it is too late. I have done little good in the world, though I do not know but that I have less to regret than if I had done more ; for people are very ungrateful ; not you, my dear, no, no. And, even if you should prove like the rest, I shall escape. There, there, I did not mean to hurt you, really. It was only a cynical second-self that

has grown so natural as to sometimes speak for me."

"It is not that, Monsieur; but I fear from what you say your days with us will not be long, and that the world has not treated you kindly; though I am sure you always seemed so very scornful and gay, as if nothing were worthy your consideration; that is, until you were so good to me, and indeed, indeed, Monsieur, I am very thankful to you, and I hope you will show your faith by not talking of leaving us." With these last words, spoken more slow and brokenly, she began to cry softly.

"Joseffa, little one, do not grieve. Death holds not a tithe of terror for me that does *ennui*; besides, I look upon it differently from youth, as possibly holding the cheerfulness of a sensation. There, there, forgive me. I shock you with these glimpses of what you term 'scornful gayety.' May you never have to learn the moods that breed it. But tell me, just as if I were going on a distant journey, never to return, and not likely to meet any one whom I could tell more than he knew himself, whether this cousin has a claim upon your heart that you would consent to grant?"

Joseffa's handkerchief swept away her tears, but not her blushes.

"Yes, a little; that is, we are both poor, and I told him it was better to forget, to go and win a

name and fame; not to think of me, that he would, of course, forget me as he should, and —” with a little gasp — “I succeeded in making him think I didn’t care for him one bit, and oh! I am so very — very afraid — he will believe it all.” Here a burst of tears veiled from her sight the grim smile which lit de Tocqueville’s face — a smile in no wise engendered by the lesson she had read him.

“So you are willing to go on living and give him up, because to let him love you would be to yield an aimless life?”

“Just that, Monsieur.”

“While you will marry some one else?”

“No, no, never!” very indignantly. “I told him, just to make him hate me, that I would marry a rich old man, and when he died, then, maybe, I might marry him. But I didn’t mean it, oh! not a bit.” A gleam had crept into de Tocqueville’s face while she spoke, to fade with her last words, leaving it impressionless as before.

“My child, I thank you for your confidence. You shall never regret it. You and Kurd will yet glean days of happiness together; leave all to me. Hush! say nothing: such bravery merits a reward greater than it may find a possibility to yield. But we shall see. Now, let us signal the coachman. Pray give me your arm. I

am a little shaken up yet, it seems ; though, remember, not a word of my attack to the Countess Zàpròny ; it might cause her uneasiness."

This last a little bitterly, as the two together, a young budding life and an old one far spent in declining, passed homeward in quiet and the gloaming.



CHAPTER VIII.

BACK at Regolstein again in the sunny weather, the great horse-chestnuts in the long *allée* full laden with a surging sea of blossom, waves of pink and waves of white commingling, until they melted and hazed in the middle distance with the tall pine forest which swept on in grim phalanx to Tübingen, fading a misty azure where its wavering outline crept into the blue of the horizon, — a horizon arching grandly back across the mighty landscape sparkling and smiling in the flood of light that flowed between.

Down on the terrace, under a silken canopy spread Chinese fashion over bamboo framework, gay with swaying tassels, flashing color, sat the Countess Natalie, making a little feint at tapestry embroidery that shared but small meed of glance with the tender landscape stretching to view.

Below the stone balustrade of the terrace, on which a group of jewelled pea-fowl swayed and fluttered, the hill swept steep and rock-gorged to a torrent full swelled by early rains, dashing its

feathery foam-plumes upon a jagged, green-fretted outline. Beyond, white church-towers rose clear against the spreading blue, bearing aloft to idle breezes their weather-cocks lazily turning; while overlooking all, and sweeping cloudward, uplifted the gray gargoyled curves and battlemented towers of Regolstein. Long rows of windows, lanced and mullioned, reflecting with a sleepy tolerance the warm, bright glowing sunshine, that spread a golden carpet, sifted to quick flitting tracery upon the flower-hung sward, and crept higher, higher, across the moss-grown sun-dial in the Park, until it lay in solid masses upon the shallow terrace stair, towards which the Countess, lost in pleasant dreamings, turned often and expectantly, as if from thence would rise their culmination; watched while the sun cast rosy shadows on the creamy fabric of her gown, flowing in long, clinging folds from Watteau drapery, misty with cascades of Mechlin that fell from throat to feet in filmy grace, half-revealing tiny red slippers, high-heeled as a Pompadour's, which beat tattoo impatiently upon the yielding pile of Sikh rugs.

"Ah! here you are, *mon ami*," she cried joyously, "ten minutes later than usual; but I will forgive you. I could forgive and condone a much more heinous crime on such a day as this, even though it were not an anniversary. Have you forgotten?"

"Am I ever likely to forget? The days that I hold golden in the calendar are marked by memories such as these. I can see you now as if it were yesterday, coming down the long salon at Wilhelma that afternoon, in the cool mezzo-light shed from the high-set Moorish windows, all blossoming in garniture of roses which seemed poor sisters to your cheeks. Yes, Natalie, and may its coming always be as golden as this sunshine — always as blossoming as this flower's counterpart." And bending his tall form above her sunny head, he took one long slender hand in his, and kissed it softly, clasping a winding coil of diamonds, fashioned like a blooming rose branch, leaf and blossom, about her full-moulded wrist. She leaned backwards, putting both arms lightly around his neck — arms that escaped in glowing symmetry their falls of lace, — and drawing his dark face close to hers, kissed him her thanks that words would poorly utter. Then, still with her hand in both his own, they sat together silent in the sunshine, lost in sweet memories of a day again recurrent in a sweet perfection.

"It seems to me," she began presently, speaking slowly in a tone half-thought, half-utterance, "that the music of that afternoon has never left off singing, like a theme woven in and out the poem of living and loving, a poem only to cease

with our being, a poem that floods all our souls with its sunshine, making being a paradise, our earth a heaven."

"A heaven soon to be invaded by outside barbarians," he added, sighing a little. "I would be content to live on thus forever, alone here with you ; but still, if you wish it, I am glad, glad as you know me always to be in fulfilling your desires, though I selfishly regret the moments which they claim you from me."

"Ah! you are but a man," she returned laughingly. "If you thought yourself fated to the future you just now pictured, you would be longing for, at the end of a month, quite as fervently as you now disrelish, the idea of outside barbarians. No, no, do not interrupt me ; you know I am but jesting, and in one short month we shall be alone again at Zàpròny ; and in the midst of those wild Hungarian mountains even our dearest friends will cease to trouble us. Though, for my part, I think a constant round of society but relieves our own happiness by a background of observation which shows so little, making me ever mindful of my present. In the meanwhile, let us enjoy this last hour before their arrival, this hour with its sunshine and springtime, as if it were to last forever. After all, what is the philosophy of happiness and the happiness of philosophy but that

which is now, in this moment, not the last, neither the one to come."

"But if the moment be an unhappy one?"

"Then it is past, bringing only its short burden, neither anticipation nor retrospection; but we have nothing to do with these. Why to me, to-day, ill seems a non-existing force—a force put away from this world of sunshine into another sphere, where ice and faint-reflectant moons, not light and flowers, enthrone it. Ill is the night of the heart—joy its day."

"A day trebly bright as a fête day. Do you know that to-day I feel like going down into the valley to seek for some poor soul on whom poverty, that winter of the heart, has sunk, and make it springtime, as we have it here."

"In the meanwhile the day would be gone, and when night came you would have, not your own, only his to remember. Let such things fall to those whose hearts bear no fruit like ours; those whose only blossoming is in the lives of others. We have no need of that. If to-night the whole world were to sweep down into oblivion, leaving only you to me, I would awake as happy as I did to-day. I know some good moralists would call this love terrible, and say that such devotion would bring its own curse. But I feel so truly, surely confident of your heart that only in

death can come what they would call my punishment, a punishment that cannot come to us in all this light. Why do I fall upon such a thought as this?" she cried, shivering a little. "I forget my own philosophy, and think."

A pained look crept into his face, a look brought about by recurrent reminder that so many of her day-dreams bore a minor tone of half-expectant, half-defied disaster, indefinite, yet always there, a death-mask tangled in the flowers. Two yellow butterflies fluttered up from the blossoms, quivered against the blue sky, then were lost in the tree-tops.

"That is life," she cried gaily; "life: what would to-day be to them with a thought of to-morrow? — To-morrow that may hold a snare and chloroform, to be a grace to some good man's collection, as I should be to some good moralist's, for all my happiness."

"And if the entomologist chloroformed but one?" he said, a little sadly, indefinitely wrought upon, as was his wont, by all her sudden, changing moods.

"One, did you say?" she queried gaily. "No, my friend, not one, but both; see how they fly together, back again now, here on the railing; see, this is their fate," and raising the long sticks of her fan aloft she crushed ruthlessly down upon

them, then lifted it slowly. One lay quite dead, a little heap of golden dust; the other, with a wing torn and broken, fluttered painfully downwards over the rocks toward the water. Her eyes opened wide, her lips half-parted, a look of terror crept into her face, her hands, ever restless, worked havoc amid the old Mechlin.

Zàpròny, thinking her tender heart filled with compassion at wreck of a moment's thoughtless folly, was about to offer solace in gay, bantering tone, holding forgetfulness, when she started suddenly from her seat towards the edge of the terrace and watched, with strained vision, the gray-green depths below. He took a place at her side, and, looking over, saw the poor butterfly floating painfully, wearily downward, lower and lower, until it swept away in the foam of the torrent.

"Ah!" she cried, excitedly, joyfully, clapping her hands together, flashing the rows of diamonds in a thousand scintillant quivers. "It is dead, it is drowned!" Her face sparkling now as the bracelet. "Do you know, I half-feared a bad omen? They are dead, both dead together. I should have dreaded to see the sun set on such ill foreboding. But now, now I fear nothing. Come, give me your arm, let us take a turn here on the terrace. Not so, now I am happy. See how my bracelet shines and sparkles. We will go to the

rose garden yonder, by Prince Eugene's window, and gather some *gloires de Dijon*, that I may deck myself out as when first you saw me."

Together they moved slowly onward, arm in arm, under giant-stretching trees which bordered their pathway. She, hardly needing the shelter of her huge, lace-decked parasol, that lent a misty, creamy background to the faint flush of her face, lit with its tawny, glistening eyes, and the red gold of her hair. Her draperies clinging and trailing about her, a soft perfume, faint, intangible as her laces, creeping upward and swaying his senses in a dreamy, half-bewildering fashion, as of enchantment. Enchantment only partly dispelled by her gay, pealing laughter, as she clustered upon her the long, trailing branches of rose bloom from bushes which swept a mass of color in and out, between the stone lions of the railing, a railing that ran along dizzy heights over which the roses hung and billowed, tempting Zàpròny to spring lightly past their barrier and shower a rain of petals down the steep, rocky pathway, far out into the sunny, sleeping valley. Then, laughing still with the joy and remembrance of that day at Wilhelma, they climbed the long stairway leading to the grand portal, passed under an archway of feathery palms and fern-trees, half-hiding armorial traceries. Down through a hall lit by great,

lanced windows, bearing, entwined, escutcheons and flowers, ever blooming in colors of crimson and amber, streaming a wealth of tinted light upon armor and portraits ; on past a portière of Cordovan leather, into a long salon, where flowers and pictures gleamed faint oases of color from out the cool, shadowy surroundings, made more cool and shadowy still by high-swung, silken awnings, which only half-concealed the glorious sweep of landscape spreading afar in valley and forest gay with the springtime.

De Tocqueville, turning away from one of the windows, advanced to greet them, quite bright apparently, from thoughts which had so engaged his attention as to leave him unconscious of their presence, until laughingly made mindful of it.

“ *Bon jour, bon jour*, Madame, a queen of roses gracing her fête day.”

“ A day that brought me coronation,” was her reply, as she held aloft the token of its remembrance to his view. While he pronounced upon the superb beauty of the gift, iced wine was served, and even as they lingered over it, discussing the coming of a gay throng of expected guests, now shortly due, the roll of carriage wheels came faintly to them betokening the earliest arrivals. Without awaiting their announcement, the Countess, close followed by Zàpròny, hastened to greet them in

the flickering radiance of the great hall, and hardly had the Princess Bieberach awakened shrill-toned echoes on the grand stairway, than the Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim made her appearance, accompanied by Joseffa, who turned a lingering glance down the long avenue, now glistening and glinting with swift-rolling equipages and the azure and argent of the Zàpròny liveries.

"But, my dear," cried the Baroness, somewhat out of breath because of admiratory explosion regarding her friend's latest enrichment, "you have no idea what good it has done me to congratulate some one else. For a whole week I have been literally smothered in letters and visits, until one would think I was about to marry off all five of my daughters, instead of only one." Before the Countess could form a laughing rejoinder, the Baroness von der Weide, and half-a-dozen others, just in by the Vienna express, made affectionate onslaught, quite exhausting the vocabulary of feminine attachment, although several of them had, quite as volubly, and with even more industry, exercised the rich vocabulary of feminine expletive for some hours previous upon the present object of endearment, because of her residence so distant from a point rendered the immediate centre of civilization by their presence.

"Ah! Madame von Pappenheim-Waggenheim,

I can imagine your sufferings," condoled de Tocqueville, quizzically viewing the scene of affectionate outpourings; "but courage, courage. It will, in all probability, soon be done with, for I have ever noticed that matrimony, like death, on once getting into a family, generally decimates it."

"Well, do you know that you almost echo what I said to Joseffa this very morning, though not in your horrible French way, that as she had always brought home every youthful disease, down to the measles, giving, as it were, things a start both ways in the family, I really did not feel as badly at her marrying, under the circumstances, as most mothers might; now that I feel assured, positively assured, that Kurd did not get his money by gambling."

"Would a matter of that kind so prey upon your moral responsibility?" queried the Count blandly, well remembering some continental experiences at Baden-Baden with the late Baron, when his own finances had been decreased in inverse ratio with Madame's season.

"Not at all, not at all; only, if he had gotten it in that way, he would very soon part with it in like manner. But I called at his bankers, and everything is quite correct and proper; how, I have no idea, because books puzzle my head so.

But he gave me a look at them and I feel quite easy."

"I fear your career as a mother-in-law will not be smooth sailing, as a quintuple experiment, if you begin by trying to prove the assertions of your acquired charges, Madame."

"Ah! my dear Count, it is only with preliminaries that I feel obliged to concern myself, and that wild, impossible story of Kurd's regarding some wretched old creature who was about to die, and all that, filled me with alarm and distrust. It was so odd, so peculiar. For no matter how piously inclined people may be, the older and more righteous they grow, the more they are opposed to giving up their money and going to heaven. But I have had a look at the books, and feel quite easy."

"Possibly," said de Tocqueville, smiling one of his slow, quizzical smiles. "Their inability to obtain the same gratifying assurances of certainty, so favorably granted you, may have something to do with the shrinking ardor of their aspirations."

"Ah!" said the Baroness, feelingly, "with the trials some poor parents are subjected to, any uncertainty would be preferable to the certainty vouchsafed them. Look at poor Scheidermantel."

"Von Rüder's *fiancée*?"

"By no means, I am speaking of parents."

"I should rather imagine, from my cold, unparental point of view, of course, that of these destined relatives, his wife is the one deserving largest share of conversational sympathy."

"His wife? Nothing of the kind. After saving and nipping his very life-blood for about forty years, making candy, or something to get his children started in life. Here comes von Rüder."

"Only forty years of toil you would place in the balance, Madame?" queried de Tocqueville. "In that case I must revoke my misplaced sympathies. They are von Rüder's totally, entirely. Hardly indeed has he won the reward which good Scheidermantel offers with his offspring."

"I should have explained more fully, this is one of the third wife's children. The others are all settled. But it really seems that Providence has saved the worst until the last, as so often happens."

"The most disagreeable remedies, both in morals and medicine, are oftenest the best. Perhaps the result is salutary."

"Indeed, the only result, so far, has been equally disastrous to his pocket-book and temper. Von Rüder, after getting more than all the others put together, and positively assuring his father-in-law that the last debt was extinguished, started off on the wedding tour. Three days later in came bills

to the extent of forty thousand marks, which must be paid or find him cashiered or something or other. Of course, after investing all that, it would never do to have it count for nothing, so he had to pay."

"But he has a son-in-law from one of the oldest families in Europe, which must be fine consolation. Rather finer than poor von Rüder's, at paying so dearly for enjoyment all past and gone."

"Ah! Count, it does well enough to moralize, but from either a parental or a plebeian point of view it is toilsome enough to get your children provided for, let alone the toil of providing."

While Joseffa's mother was dilating upon the theme of parental affection, Joseffa herself was receiving some highly appropriate matrimonial advice from the Princess Bieberach, by whom she had been thankfully rescued from the midst of a conversational whirlpool, in which compliments were showered with flattering impartiality upon her own good fortune and the beauty of Baroness von der Weide's French poodle. "Come with me, my dear; who would have thought such a little while ago, when we were driving to church together, and I giving you so many good maxims, that you would be called upon to put them into practice. Doubtless a reward for your devotion. I never thought of praying for a husband for you myself, not kneeling

at all comfortably. But I suspect you did. Most good girls do. There, there, don't blush. I am sure it was very proper and ladylike. Now come with me away from all this chattering mob ; I have something far more entertaining than they in my apartment," and together they ascended the long stairway, Joseffa stopping, now and then, to catch a faint glimpse, through some storied lattice, of wide-stretching, blossoming plains, until, at last, they reached the suite allotted Princess Bieberach.

"Now, Joseffa," with very weighty mien, as Jeanette, the facial artist, handed her a velvet jewel *etui*, for which they had been waiting, the Princess in an expectancy best described as breathless, and she in mild wonderment, "here is something I wish you to wear for my sake, not to mention the conjugal felicity it may sustain. This is one of poor Bieberach's necklaces," disclosing to view a superb band of seed pearls, set rosette fashion. "It is enough to make one ill to see the way women go about now-a-days, with their necks done up in black velvet bands, like the hats of their footmen, and I determined that you should never have the excuse for presenting such a spectacle. I always took an interest in you, my dear, even when you had no *affaire de cœur*."

"O ! Madame, I can never think of it ; really it is too *grande dame* for me. I am sure, posi-

tive, that Kurd would always care as much for me with this little knot of his colors at my throat, as if it were bound in diamonds."

"Tut, tut, child; of course he would, now—anything satisfies a man before marriage and nothing after. Remember what I say and accept this evidence as a reminder; nature is all well enough, but a day comes in the history of each one of us—to some sooner, some later—when art has to come to its assistance. Now, poor Bieberach, if he could only look down, or up, from wherever he is, how surprised he would be! Most probably not recognize me at all, for I have improved so, thanks to that wonderful creature Jeanette. But there is the gong for *déjeuner*; let us descend at once, for no art will restore the vanished beauty of a *chef's* productions once grown cold. *Ciel!*" as they reached the *grande étage*; "I positively refuse to be bored into premature senility by that wretched old de Luneville,"—a personage already upon them, and bowing with a courtesy suave and Gallic.

"Madame la Princesse, *radiante, Parisienne.*"

"Thanks, Monsieur le Générale," with a sweeping obeisance; "I am, I know, naturally *radiante*, but only Parisienne so far as my maid pleases. I have small ambition to be accredited to a town whose great men are all foreigners, though

as individuals I find them charming, I assure you. Here comes one now. Count de Tocqueville, your arm," and sweetly, serenely smiling, she escaped a doom into which a greater amiability would have inevitably plunged her, leaving poor Joseffa in a state of semi-paralysis, as direct effect of the scene she had been forced to witness because of a blockade caused by polite haste to gain the breakfast room; though she presently managed, after some difficulty, and repeated effort, to reach her mother's side; but not until old General von Schwangelstein, by no means so unwillingly detained, had chuckled himself quite blue in the face; a proceeding which increased the already respectable proportions of General de Luneville's rage, until his teeth, being equally adjustable with the Princess's politeness, rattled like castanets.

"How frightful! and at her age," chattered the von der Weide, "openly forcing herself upon de Tocqueville's attention."

"Not at all, my dear; they are desperate friends. I hear that in prehistoric times he proposed to her, but Bieberach carried her off on his title."

"Perhaps a feeling of gratitude at blessed escape dictates present devotion."

"Most probably, *ma chère*, though I would not

say so in her hearing for *worlds*; she has *such* a tongue," returned the Princess Ostrande solicitously, steadfastly determining on her first opportunity to repeat the scene, with deviatory embellishments, and witness prophesied results, which, when they came to pass, quite exceeded her most sanguine expectations.

Thus the procession trailed onward until the heavy portières dropped together, to open, after a considerable season and admit the egress of more amiability than they had closed upon. The guests scattered, some to the music room, whence, now and then, little fragments of *chansonnettes* floated gaily, to mingle with laughter as gay from picturesque groups on the terrace, smoking cigarettes of Turkish *tabac* and sipping Russian tea from tall crystal beakers, glistening amber with sifted sunshine,— a nineteenth century Watteau.

In the picture-gallery, resting upon luxurious divans, beneath a flood of mystic, tempered light, shed through high-set windows, a merry party of cosmopolites interchanged the *chronique scandaleuse* of Algiers, Monte Carlo, Nice — every quarter of the globe but their own original one. Conspicuous among them shone the white-crested head and kindly blue eyes of Prince Daggerhof, who, together with his nephew Waldemar, was,

quite as solecism, not in from Paris; but his home estates.

Neither one, however, could catch more than a bright, unsatisfactory glimpse of conversation with the Countess Natalie, who passed animatedly from group to group, leaving here a smile of welcome, there a sunny recollection of some bygone remembering. Decked still with the clustering *gloires de Dijon*, which blossomed and trailed in pink, waxy fragrance along the outline of her bosom that evening, when the liquid tones of a great tenor swept out on the wings of the moonlight, and hushed the gay babble to silence—babble to break forth afresh, until the small hours had been tolled from the church in the village.



CHAPTER IX.

THE shadowy castle rose into the misty silver of the night, flecked and outlined with tiny, flashing balls of fire which swung, multifarious in color and array, from base to battlement.

Down in the park, in chain of red and yellow, Chinese lanterns swayed thick with the pink and white flowers of castaneas, while Venetian masts swept skyward, bearing lines of flaming, vacillating color above the stone lions of the terrace, sleeping in a frozen silence upon beds of trailing roses, roses that filled all the air with a perfume heavy, and mingling with music as sensuous which swept out on the night wind. A great ball was in progress. For hours the roll of carriage wheels had filled the long avenue leading to the grand portal, where silken awnings, crimson carpets, servants in gala livery, made a flame of color reflectant in *flambeaux*, gleaming and serpentine, flashing from iron-wrought standards fixed in the blossoming stone of the stairway. Within, glis-

tening and glinting beneath chandeliers of crystal laden with tapers, floated the sheen of silks, jewels, and velvets, glittering uniforms, gold bullion and bright-starred decorations, as a tone-burst of music pealed forth in rhythmic exultance like the song of the birds in the sunlight.

Waldemar Daggerhof, who had been dancing almost without intermission, stood for a moment just beyond the long rows of red-covered *fauteuils* encircling the dancers in the great ball-room, half lost in a fit of abstraction arising from excess of pleasurable excitement, when suddenly, raising his eyes, he caught the smiling glance of Countess Zàpròny, who beckoned him a little with her huge bouquet of creamy roses. "Come, come," she cried gaily, as he approached, "no moping; every moment must be so radiant that my ball will be brightly remembered as a *bal des bals*, even by those who have waltzed to the cadence of all climes. Though I will fairly admit that to-night your court to the débutantes of three cities has filled me with respect for your Terpsichorean powers. Now, as reward, carry my roses and give me your arm to one of the balconies. I feel the need of a breath of fresh air." While he murmured his thanks for the distinction bestowed, they moved slowly onward, lingering here and there for a moment at will of the Countess, who

left in her wake a ripple of smiles because of some bright *mot*, or gay bit of raillery, as they passed on towards the music room, filled now with animated groups, industriously coquetting behind the faint screen of fans storied by Bouchat or René, which ceased for a moment their flutter to wave a bright recognition, as the Countess and Walde-mar proceeded to a low, light-flooded balcony, designated her choice; remembering suddenly, with comical dismay, as she sank upon a bamboo divan, the lack of her chiefest source of refreshment in this restful moment snatched from hospitable duties incumbent—her fan had been forgotten. Bidding him fetch one, for the night had grown heavy and sultry, he left on his mission with her bright laughter echoing a gay deprecation at what she termed her ‘feminine sense of employment,’—laughter which lost itself presently in a little sigh of half-tired enjoyment, as she looked out at the fairy land jewelled and sparkling beneath her to fade into background of shadow, black as that marked by the light flood in which she rested. The sad, sobbing waltz from Galathée crept out on the night, to rise and fall in little gusts, upborne by a breeze from the foam-sprinkled ravine, rushing in sharp, chilly gasps, that turned to pale, ghostly silhouettes the rows of tall Lombardy poplars, shivering their silvery lin-

ings against a black sky, cloud-robb'd of moonbeams. A man, standing in the shadow, watched her as she looked up at the darkling night, then down at the whispering valley; watched her as she drew a light wrap across the gleam of her shoulders; saw her shiver a little at chill of the night wind uplifting the waltz's monotonous cadence, then slowly arise, looking about with half-troubled gaze at the blackness fluttering around her, putting out with its breath, or half-dimming, the gleaming of lanterns.

All the while he crept noiselessly, stealthily nearer, until the sharp crashing of twigs on the terrace told of a footfall approaching, causing her to turn as she was about entering the now-deserted music-room, with strained, half-startled gaze towards the railing, and, as the light gleamed faintly upon him, to hold out both hands and call softly, "Bèla." The figure, emerging from shadow, came suddenly close to the balustrade, and there, for an instant, stood motionless in the glow of wax-lights streaming outward with glaring distinctness, which marked each feature white, clear, beyond all chance of mistaking, as it rose from a hovering background of blackness. The Countess, transfixed, frozen, stood ghastly white, her tawny eyes starting with horror, her hands still outstretched but with palms slowly averted, as a dreadful trembling came on her,

making her powerless to articulate the one word her lips, convulsively forming, refused to utter — “Narcisse,” as if a spectre had risen on wings of the night-time from out hot deep grave of the valley, — “*Narcisse*.” Nearer and nearer his face crept to hers until his eyes, looking full in her own, with lids nerveless to shut out the horrible vision, smiled down in ghastly triumph at her agony, at the clammy sweat standing thick on her forehead. Then her trembling limbs refused to support her, and she fell forward, half-kneeling, upon the low divan, her eyes fixed on his still, with a wild disbelieving, as if some vile apparition had crept on her waking.

“Madame la Comtesse Zàpròny,” he said hoarsely through his shut teeth, grasping her wrists in a vice, and drawing her down close to the edge of the railing, closer and closer still, until his hot breath seared and burned like a flame on the ice of her forehead.

“Madame la Comtesse Zàpròny,” his voice filled with scorn and gloating derision. “So you thought me done with. You, with your cursed virtue that brought me what you hoped my death-wound,” and relaxing the hold of one hand to grasp tense both with the other, he pushed up his long hair, disclosing a deep cicatrix running low on his forehead, then shook it back, scowling

with wrath, as his breath came thick and fast through firm-shut teeth in fierce vehemence, awakened by rage, all unreasoning, which laid at her feet the blame of his life's wreck. "So you thought me done with, to reap disappointment; to shut me up in a living tomb, trusting me hopeless. You, with your whining, that set de Saignon on me to cut down my life and avenge outraged virtue. What are you now better than she? What are you now but Zàpròny's mistress? Faugh! you need have no fear; I will not claim you. Stay where you are, live on your charming idyl, but only on this one condition, that you give me now, to-night, the sum I deem sweeter than revenge. Unless you give word of fulfilment, I will go with you now, dragging you out before these fools and dupes, before the greatest of all — your husband. I will give the lie to all your cursed life, and drag you and your vile happiness so low in the dust that worms will be your only rescuers. Do you hear me?"

While he was speaking she had wrenched her arms free from his grasp, struggling fiercely with all her might, then dropped on the divan, shivering, clutching and tearing at her gauze wrap until it lay in long ribbons about her feet, trembling still, unable to speak; but suddenly realizing, with a flash which swept through her paralyzed brain,

that Daggerhof might come and thus find her, she strove to rise, motioning him off with both hands dumbly pleading, then fell back, her head with all its glorious mass of red gold drooping low on the coping; the chill of the stone seemed to help her a little; she tried to form words to coherent utterance, as he stood there, merciless, calmly smiling, gloating on the misery of death which he had brought upon her, deigning no word beyond what he had told her.

"I . . will," she began, brokenly, "do what . . you . . ask . . anything . . but for God's sake," shivering afresh, "leave me now, quickly. I will meet you there . . at that window beyond, when . . the ball is . . ended; go . . go, anything . . leave me," as she heard footsteps echoing across the parquet of the music-room.

Slowly he drew back into the shadow, with a deliberation that left the cruel scorn of his smiling triumph half-visible still in the blackness and shadow, as Waldemar's quick steps sounded nearer.

Yes, he was gone. With a gasp, almost a sob, she turned towards the open window, through which the young Russian sprang lightly to bend over her smiling. "Madame la Comtesse, I beg your pardon for having —" he began in a tone of gay deprecation, to abruptly cease in affright, as he caught a glimpse of her haggard, terrified coun-

tenance, in which she was bravely endeavoring to frame an attempt at a smile that her eyes failed to reflect, even faintly,—eyes staring wide and burning with a fixed tensivity of gaze which made them wildly beseeching, as she sprang forward, catching his arm in both her hands in plea for protection.

“What has happened, Madame?” he cried, thrusting himself between her and the railing, with one hand searching as if for his pistol, the other shielding, and pressing her in towards the window, looking keenly about in endeavor to pierce with his gaze the immediate blackness.

“Oh! nothing, nothing, Monsieur,” she began uncertainly, attempting to draw him from the balcony into the music room, fearfully dreading lest he might distinguish the receding shadow of Narcisse, still dimly visible to her, but not to his light-dazzled eyes. “It is nothing, absolutely nothing. Do you not remember,” with a pitiful attempt at lightness, “once, long ago, how you frightened me, talking of grass blades and daggers?” Then suddenly, catching with pleading again at his arm, while a violent shivering racked her, she begged him to take her in out of the horrible darkness in a tone which conveyed only terror. On crossing the broad embrasured window leading to the music room, she turned from him a moment with eyes fixed on the black infinity

beyond, seeming to gather a fierce, sudden strength from some fresh-awakened reminder ; a strength which gave vestige of her old mien, as she bade him, in a tone strained to quiet, deliberate self-containment, get her some wine.

“Get it yourself, please, Monsieur ;” then, when he hesitated an instant, dreading to leave her alone, she continued, “I am no longer afraid ; as I said, it is nothing, a mere spasm of nervousness. Why do you not go as I bid you ? Go quickly,” she added, with chafing, increasing impatience which left him no choice, though he turned at the doorway, still reluctant, to see her pacing to and fro rapidly, pulling the roses from out her bouquet and scattering them thickly, as if in disdain of her weakness. Seizing the wine carafe from him, she filled to the brim a deep-bowled glass, and lifting it in her trembling grasp, drained it quickly, her teeth chattering against the crystal as she drank, then began her pacing again, unheeding of him.

Directly she ceased abruptly, turning to him, on hearing the sound of a waltz floating out from the ball-room.

“Oh ! I had forgotten. Come, come ! This despicable weakness has made me even forgetful of my guests. We must return to the ball-room at once. I am quite well now. Forget all this childish emotion, this foolish caprice of nerves over-

wrought with incessant round of enjoyment. Banish even the thought from your mind. It would only cause my good friends anxiety where none is needful ; though I thank you sincerely, Monsieur, for see, you have cured me," and turning upon him she smiled with a quick, determinate smile, as of one who, in facing some wild, inavertible danger, gives even death in derision.

He ventured no word of comment beyond the conventional assurance, and waltzed a turn with her, as she bade him, beneath the white light of the ball-room, which gleamed on none more gay and unflagging than she, though at times her gayety bore trace of an animation almost forced in untiring prolongment, causing Zàpròny, always watchfully mindful, to beg her, in tender concern, not excel even her superb strength in undue exertion to make her ball what it had already proven, in all that her ambition willed it, a *bal des bals*, even to those who had waltzed on the ice of the Neva, or under the moonlight in flower-hung courts to guitars of Sevilla.

The last carriage had rolled away from the portal in gray of the dawning, a dawning rendered dim and slothful because of full-charged rain-clouds hanging heavy and pall-like, to mingle with mist trailing up from the valley.

The house had grown still and silent, the gay,

pealing laughter and music were hushed, to leave shadowy gloom and a leaden, intermittent patter of raindrops, echoing heavy and dull upon the terrace.

The Countess, still in her ball dress, with a face bearing only drawn, haggard misery instead of the gay masque of abandon so lately its guest of expression, stole softly along the vast corridors, dim in pale, uncertain daylight, which lent ghostly proportion to shadow.

Stole softly along through a great palace sleeping, to the wing containing Prince Eugene's window, a wing ever avoided, deserted, save in the broadest of daylight, and pushed on its hinges the massive door creaking suddenly, noisily, out on the stillness, awakening a shudder at memory of the fallen mirror and her affright when last she entered this grim storied suite. Hurriedly crossing the floor which bore, dimly traced, a shadow deeper than those hovering above it, she opened the window and peered out into the misty uncertainty.

He was there in a moment, standing beside her, not wearing the angry scowl of impatience with which he had waited, but smiling a slow, scornful smile of gratified malevolence.

"Well, I am here," she said, coldly, in a tone that bore clear to his ear the assurance that the

woman, just now cowed and humiliated with unreasoning, terrified horror, had been replaced by one who, if not in actuality, at least in outward semblance, sustained no other feeling than cold contempt and scorn which held mastery.

When she had spoken, he stood silent a space, lost in contemplation, yielding quick change of expression, as of one reviewing long lapses of time in a flitting moment. "You have grown handsomer," he said, presently, half in thought; then, hearing his own words and grasping their bearing, laughed in sardonic derision at what he had been able to bring her.

"You are here to obtain money, not pay compliments. Your presence under any circumstances is hateful enough to me. Proceed with your business."

Her words angered him. He strode a step nearer, catching her bare arm roughly. "Be careful. In the past I was not what I am now. Every vestige of that shame which compels us to kiss when we would strangle, has been torn out of my nature, leaving instead a hate that could find no hell deep enough for the punishment of those who have brought on me this blight, making of my life a wreck greater than that of my body, as you left me, penned like a rat to die, and thus fulfil your fond hopings: Never more trouble you; never

to know of the happiness you had stolen in a world from which your cursed virtue had me hurled out. You and that jade de Saignon, whose life was a moral epic to yours in its double-faced lying and contempt of every law worldly and moral.

"You thought yourself safe, my intellect a thing of the past, like my honor, that you could steal off with what was left of my wealth and impose yourself, a saintly adventuress, upon some dupe to your handsome figure and bearing; a beautiful saint, with a heart as lying and black as that of your vile Russian mother."

She uttered no word in response to this rage-choked tirade, standing there in the vice of his grasp, scornfully smiling with a contempt that gave increase to the hatred which impelled his emotion, until he reached the climax of almighty, will-forced endurance of insult in reviling the name of her mother. Then her eyes flashed, she wrenched herself loose from his hold with a power that sobered his face in surprise, casting him from her with a force which impelled him staggering, then falling against the wainscot. Quickly advancing again and blazing a wrath in her tawny eyes and quivering, bloodless lips and nostrils, which cowed him by its might and suddenness, as she stood there above him, recalling dimly to mind half-slumbering visions of angels and devils com-

mingling in dreams of his madness, to curse and appall with the realm of their presence.

“Back, back, I tell you, out of my sight, away from my presence, or I will add murder to all these sins which you have brought on me. To think that the thing I now look on with loathing once wrung my heart almost to breaking. That I gave my young, spotless life to this hideous wretch who made sport of its faith and devotion, left my arms for those of the wife of another—who comes back now, resurrected from a grave dug by his own loathsome passions to try to put out the light of my life, which he only failed in wrecking because cut off by a timely vengeance; who would revile the dead in her grave, and draw down her child's blessed memories to his own grovelling level. Your fortune? Ask that of your mistress de Saignon and her noble husband; go to them for subsistence, rather than beg of one who gives you, not from fear, but contempt and loathing pity, that she may know, and hope, living will hold, does yet hold, tortures for you greater, deeper than death. I have in my power, yes, here, in these hands, papers given me by de Tocqueville, your uncle, notes forged in his name in the wild extremity of your reckless squanderings, and a letter proving your guilt from Follet, the banker,—proving your guilt, which was hushed for the sake of

the name. A guilt causing you to creep here in the dark, fearful of justice, justice that would be a prison, for aught I know the galleys. Would you trouble me then? The galleys mean freedom for me, death in life to you, greater than madness, because it holds understanding.

“The love that now gives me protection is mighty enough to grant me pardon, forgiveness. Your day, as a blot on my life, is done, extinguished forever.” While she spoke he drew himself slowly upward from where the force of her rage had cast him. Listening, first with ill-feigned indifference, then with unmasked emotion which was almost beyond leash as he stood there quivering and writhing under the scourge of her wrath, — an emotion giving place to a great flash of exultance on hearing de Tocqueville had hushed up his guilt; followed on close with a play of calm, ironical indifference which recalled the training of a diplomat, as he began in a strain, measured and studied, as if gathering words and ideas as he warily spoke them:—

“You have papers; well, what of that? Prove that they are genuine, and not like this marriage of yours. The only witness is Follet, the banker:—he is dead. De Tocqueville I can face any hour with his criminal concurrence with you in this marriage, and shake his testimony beyond all hope

of belief ; prove it a part of your plot to entrap Zàpròny as prey and yield you the wealth of Aladdin. Come, I am no dupe, like your present spouse. Give me the money I ask and save yourself, not me, from a prison and death in life, of which you prate so freely. Like all women, you have always left a remnant of conscience never too dead to prick and twinge with misgiving. You must have the world of sensation to drown out its cryings, even in moments of bliss which cannot be lived out alone, nor yet with the aim of your dupings. Would society welcome you then, even though you held aloft his forgiveness ? Where innocence fails, would you triumph ? I am ready now for the money ; will you give it or not ? I wish to be going."

The look of triumphant excitement faded out of her face, as his words gathered force, until she stood now with an expression of misgiving and hope struggling hard for the mastery. "How much do you wish ?" she questioned, coldly and curtly.

"A hundred thousand marks will suffice, for the present. Well, why do you hesitate ? Make your own choice, though. Revenge in your downfall would be dearer to me. Your — husband — is rich, bless his coffers. Dip into them for me by right of a prior attachment."

Again her eyes blazed forth in wrath. "Have a care. I may yet give my hatred the mastery and bring us both down together, rather than see you go unpunished. Not one centime of his money shall be yours, that I promise. Here is the remnant left from your wretched thievings and squanderings, which I have always kept safe in my jewel case, disdaining, even when I knew less, the interest that otherwise it would have yielded. Take it, and go." He drew a step nearer, she involuntarily recoiling from him, dropping the roll of thousand mark notes into his outstretched palm, as one would give alms to a leper, forgetting, in her mighty loathing, the forged notes which she held in the other. A quick step, a flash of the arm, and his strong, firm fingers had grasped at the papers, but not before she had clasped her own tightly upon them.

The struggle began; from side to side they swayed together in the dim daylight, across the blood-stained parquet towards Prince Eugene's window. A wrench, a sudden twist, a flexible bending, and his greater strength had gained them in mastery from her.

One moment he waved them aloft in laughing derision before her terrified eyes, starting in a wild, hopeless supplication. Then he was gone.

The rain beating down on the terrace was all

the sound that came through the sickly gray of the morning.

She staggered forward to the still open window, holding her breast with both hands, as if to cover some mortal wound from the day's eye, uncertainly closed the French casement, crossed the floor with wavering weakness, and groped her way down the still misty passage.

Peering softly into her husband's apartment, to find him peacefully sleeping, then, closing the portière doors of her own, she broke forth in weeping, stifling her cries, as they grew beyond all control, with the tapestries hung from armorial groinings.



CHAPTER X.

FRÄULEIN PUTZ had been charged with the chaperonage of Joseffa and Kurd, which she was accomplishing in a high degree of dejected indifference, quite in keeping with the sultry air, surcharged and heavily laden with moisture from the morning's rain.

Wandering, either discreetly in advance, or lagging considerably behind, as they aimlessly paced between the flowering borders of the Botanical Gardens; the good Putz avoiding, as far as lay in her limited power, too close juxtaposition with the endless array of snowy, disreputably bedraggled Venuses that sprang from rain-soaked rose-beds.

Directing with varying guidance, finally successful, their course towards the orange-trees which stood in glossy, flower-crowned array upon the green stretch immediately adjoining the Anlagen. Here, while tender youth found distraction in orange-blossomed reflections, she sought abstraction in viewing the occasional whirl of a bespattered equipage along the mud-paved *allée*; mak-

ing presently, in haste-impelled dignity, her best Louis XIV. courtesy, which sent the many dangling and beribboned ends of her toilette fluttering to the air with breezy horizontalism. Almost simultaneously, the check string pulled, the equipage stopped, and Fräulein Putz's parasol set up an emotional flutter, by way of signal, towards the orange-trees, which might have been the objects beckoned for all the response that her excited appeal awakened; though the occupant of the carriage saw, quite distinctly, two figures, one gleaming in airy muslin, the other brave in blue of the Uhlans, lost in mutual admiration with a degree of absorption not emulated by nature in her present mood.

"Joseffa! Joseffa!" called a shrill-pitched voice with quick detonation; and the person thus addressed raised a face suffused in blushes to meet the eye-glass of Princess Bieberach calmly fixed upon her. "You are delighted to see me, my dear. Let me save you the necessity of prevarication; but it seems actually providential that I met you, for I have just gotten a most important letter regarding the change of *tournure* in bridal robes, and drove in especially to see your mother that we might have the effect tried upon you, although I am in an actual state of senility. I said to Jeanette, on going to bed after the ball, not to

think of awakening me, or, if I died, disturbing my bones, before *déjeuner*. But really, I should not have slept a wink had I read this letter sooner. As it is, I have left the entire house steeped in slumber to rush in with the news. Come, get in, my dear ; there is a seat for your companion, and as for the Lieutenant," with a general air of indifferential arrangement. "we can drop him at a club or some place or other." Upon which Joseffa, with evident reluctance, and Fräulein Putz with as evident alacrity, climbed into the carriage, while the Lieutenant, depicting a gloom caught from the sky or Joseffa's departure, turned right about face with a military salute, and betook himself in direction of the Reiter Kaserne.

"My child," began the Princess as they bowled past the Palace gardens, "you need not look so fearfully dejected. The matter which we have to discuss is of far more vital importance than anything you two could find to talk about ; and as for my taking you away, he will, as a sure consequence, think twice as much of you, though he will doubtless abominate me. But that fails to signify, as I do not have to marry him. My wonderful letter comes from Nannette Nikisoff, who never writes about anything but costumes, and, naturally, I thought it bathing dresses, for they

wear little else at Trouville, where she is stopping, so of course I did not open it, not intending to go to the seashore just yet; but imagine my surprise, when, longing for something to wake me up as I sipped my café, I bethought me of Nannette's epistle. There it was in black and white, quite correct in every particular; for if Nannette is never correct in anything else, she assuredly is in matters of costume. When I had gotten only half through, I saw the providence of the whole—your approaching marriage and a chance of making a charming position in society as unimpeachable authority at a single stroke. For the *tournure* is *ravissante*, and has only been shown to one or two most intimate friends on vowing absolute secrecy, so, of course, I will not mention it to a soul but yourself. Your mother, I know, will be positively enchanted."

A prediction singularly verified on reaching the Baroness's salon in the Neckar Strasse, where both ladies, in an ecstasy of satisfaction, witnessed the enforcement of Madame Nikisoff's revelations.

"Now as for Marie and Sophia," asserted Princess Bieberach from her comfortable enthrone-ment, when the portière had dropped upon a much-worn *modiste*, and minor affairs held their attention, "you can, I am sure, work some kind of a change in their constitutions by sending them

to a colder climate. How would Russia do? There was Lady Hartington, whose two daughters talked of nothing but hunting and horse-racing. In despair she took them to Italy, hoping the climate might tone them down into a semblance of languor, or at least, less energy, and just as she was congratulating herself upon a notable benefit, they both died of Roman fever. Now more ozone might work wonders for your two, and as they have excellent lungs you need fear no disastrous results—at least, I hope not. But as we have attended to these matters of the *tournure* and the girls, my dear, suppose we have a comfortable chat about our friends; though we have not had an opportunity to talk them over together for so long, it makes me feel absolutely ghoulish. It is sad for friends to be separated as we have been, so much of the world escapes us; and there are some of whom I wish particularly to know; a mutual interest demands my attention. The Baroness von der Weide, for instance. She, I believe, comes in some way from Seidlitz-Pfefferingen, does she not? My own experiences there were so slight that my remembrances are vague. Poor dear papa always avowed that the place was so stagnant it gave him moral malaria. He loved Paris so tenderly, though that may have been because he knew the city better.”

"Ah! my friend, you awaken such memories. The von der Weides — Marie, Sophia, Joseffa, my dears, you may retire; but first ring the bell and order *café*."

While these directions were completing fulfilment, the Princess was spreading and arranging her draperies in pleased expectancy, as of one awaiting the gratification of long-sought information — information postponed unconscionably, at a moment promising revelation, while the Baroness solicitously ascertained whether her interlocutor preferred *café noir* or *café au lait*. Being relieved in mind by an indication of preferment in favor of *café noir*, she proceeded to secondary causes.

"You allude to Hélène's husband's branch of the von der Weides, do you not?"

"Nothing of the kind. I mean her own family, the Gumpholdskirchen."

"How you relieve my mind, *ma chère*. I was almost dreading to proceed."

"Why so? There is no one here to be shocked. As for the matter of that, we all know, of course, how the father of the present Baron ran off to Switzerland with his governess and then came back."

"But married. She was a Swiss, and the Swiss are *so* correct."

"Indeed? I know they are noted for virtue

and cheese ; but, for my own part, I have found them strongly prone to employ themselves so busily in avoiding all appearance of evil, as to have no time left to avoid the evil itself. Quite English, in fact ; though as for the von der Weides, one phase of the injunction mattered as immaterially as the other ; and why they ever undertook to better that dull, overgrown Carl's mental condition I never understood, when he would have done excellently for the army in his natural state, being, like so many others, quite safely embarricaded in his own ignorance until a woman undertook enlightenment : but as they are both dead why need we trouble ourselves ? Proceed, I beg of you."

"I know that you have travelled much more than I, and are more correctly informed regarding propriety of action, my dear ; but when you begin about the von der Weides, really, you make me quite sad, recalling, somehow, poor Cleopatra Varasov's trouble. I have thought about her strangely much to-day. She said to me once, that if one made a single step downwards the world of his acquaintance knew it in full particular a quarter of an hour after it happened ; but if one climbed a height they saw his first faint reflection a quarter of a century after he was dead — that the world looks down, not up."

"That being the case, *ma chère*, I quite deem it my duty to keep well abreast of the times, and if my neighbors occupy themselves delving in the mire, I have nothing left to do but follow their example — the more industriously the greater my safety. I have not the slightest idea that the world will cease talking about women until they cease talking about each other; and as that hour will, I am quite positive, not come in my day, I see no need of reform. But the Gumpholds-kirchen — what did they do?"

"Nothing, that I can think of. Their entire time, when I knew them, seemed to be spent in going to church and learning the languages, which they practised upon their foreign relations during lengthy visitations afforded them."

"Foreign relations, did you say? Were they with them much?"

"Quite a good deal. One cousin in particular, a young fellow with a beautiful tenor voice, who was very devoted to Hélène, and every one thought his feelings reciprocated, until von der Weide proved the reverse."

"Indeed? You interest me greatly," returned the Princess, brightening perceptibly; "I quite dote on romance. Did this young cousin of whom you speak, ever cultivate his beautiful tenor voice to any extent?"

“O! Of course he did. How odd of me to forget! You quite assist my memory. When Hélène married, he avowed a sudden intent of going upon the stage. The family were enraged, naturally, and refused to have anything to do with him, even when he had made a great success — though really his *nom du théâtre* has escaped me entirely. Not having sung here in Stuttgart, I could hardly hope to remember it.”

“Perhaps if you repeated the alphabet you might successfully recall it. I have found that an infallible assistant when at loss for anything of the kind,” insinuated the Princess blandly.

“I am positive that it was neither A nor Z,” declared the Baroness promptly.

“Suppose we try some of the intervening letters; we still have twenty-three resources left us,” asserted the inquirant, by no means disconcerted at such a beginning. “E or F, for instance. Think again.”

“E — E — no, not E; F — F — fa — fe — Funnel — Fannelli!” with sudden triumph, “Carlo Fannelli. Have you ever heard of him?”

“O! Quite frequently; he sings in Vienna,” replied the Princess, with a slow smile of supreme gratification.

“Yes, Carlo Fannelli. Really, your faculty for awakening my powers of reminiscence is little short of marvellous.”

"You flatter me, my dear—you do, I assure you. I have not given you half the grounds for accusation that I intend giving some people," returned the other, in modest truthfulness, as she drew her laces about her and descended to her equipage, now long in waiting. Rolling homeward, with a countenance calmly complacent, smiling somewhat sardonically, on alighting at foot of the terrace stair, to observe the object of her late minute inquiries cast glances of polite and unmistakable significance towards Princess Ostrande, as de Tocqueville came forward to meet her; though she smiled again in passing, this time with equal sweetness of serenity upon them both. Disappearing almost immediately, to remain invisible until just before the announcement of dinner, when she made her *entrée* in the grand salon—a triumph of Jeanette's skill—a skill which had required some hours for its manipulations, though no evidence of flagging serenity betrayed regret at tediousness of the undertaking, as she claimed Waldemar Daggerhof's arm to escort her to the dining-room, an honor unconventional in its conference, but none the less appreciable, being regarded by him with absolute relief, a full escape from his own thoughts under cover of her gay cynicism; for the day had hardly been as propitiously employed as by his companion, but filled

with vague, troubled conjecture, which had even robbed him of sleep by its forced presence.

The sudden, painful agitation of the Countess, her utter abandon to indefinable fear and dread, quickly followed by reckless defiance that found vent in gayety, so genuine in outward semblance as to puzzle him still more, had left its mark upon his impressionable, acutely observant nature, that acquired nervous excitement, restless energy for analytical study, from baffled vivisection of psychical motive and effect.

The Countess Zàpròny had not made her appearance at *déjeuner*, on plea of fatigue ; but as fully half the ladies in the place had taken a wing of fowl and glass of wine in their own apartments, to blossom forth on the terrace somewhat later, her defection was, even then, quite compatible with the unusual demand upon her energies as hostess at a feast rendered so largely successful by her brilliant, unflagging spirit.

Although the face of Count Zàpròny bore a look of troubled perplexity, until, on opening hastily a little parchment note signed 'Natalie', the shadow melted in a smile, as, refolding it, he announced that Madame had fully convalesced from her slight indisposition, and would join them at dinner. Waldemar turned his attention from the Princess, momentarily, to cast a swift, half-veiled glance towards her as she entered.

Her bearing and mien were regal, commanding, quite at her best, as, leaning upon Zàpròny's arm, she smilingly replied to little ejaculations and congratulations which welcomed her again among them, but to his quick eye a dash of *rouge* sustained the color where her own was wont to flush, and the deep hollows about her eyes, gleaming with a restless feverishness, while bearing out in evidence her announced indisposition, gave trace of agony that burned and seared beneath a calm exterior, which, even in the measured gesture of her hands, bore to his quickened sense of observation an impression of mighty self-command, forced to a tense endurance almost bounding forth from the magnificent restraint that held in leash with nerves fused to steel.

The dinner was purely a home affair, the house party alone being gathered in the great dining-room about a table ablaze with lights and flowers, the vast apartment filled with a soft hum of voices, echoing from hangings of Cordovan leather, bright little exchange of experiences breathing a spirit of *bonhomie* which people thrown intimately together in a country house learn involuntarily to assume.

A merry hum that increased, rather than diminished as the *menu* progressed, wines quickening ideas to shifting glimpse of gayety and color,

bringing to none a greater modicum than Countess Natalie, who drank more deeply than the sip with which she was wont to place each glass aside in turn, surprising Waldemar by full return of that gayety of mood, now still more genuine, which had last night so puzzled him.

The lights, the company, laughter, and conversation seemed to bring a corresponding ratio of realness and security, as of one accustomed to find forgetfulness in surroundings equally with action, a forcing out of all mental intrusion not springing from, or in unison with, the moment.

They had just ceased laughing at a gay sally of de Tocqueville's, subsiding into individual enjoyment, to relapse to silence which Germans describe as the passing of an angel through the room, — a proceeding in this present instance materially hastened, if not abruptly put a stop to, by the Princess Bieberach announcing in her shrillest, most portentous tone of possible, delightfully wicked import, that she had a charming romance to recite.

“A romance equal to those of the middle ages, and beginning in a matter-of-fact place which you would never suspect as the cradle of such a delightful idyl, none other, my dear Baroness von der Weide, than Seidlitz-Pfefferingen. Were you ever there?”

The Baroness responded with praiseworthy indifference that she sustained faint memory of the place, though the sudden glance of startled suspicion with which she had regarded Princess Ostrande when Madame blithely struck her prelude was not of corresponding airiness.

“Ah! I am glad not an intimate association,” came the rejoinder, given somewhat dryly, “for I should desperately regret relating anything which could be anticipated, line for line, like a breviary. Though I am foolishly taking it for granted that all are in ignorance, maybe some of you are not, possibly having had experiences there. In that case, please correct me, and even if, as *raconteur*, I should vary unwittingly, it will hardly matter materially, for really it is so delightfully —” and the Princess hesitated for a fitting expression, looking down at her many-ringed claws sufficient space to give the entire length of the table excellent opportunity for a careful survey of her toilette, and Jeanette’s efforts in pink and white. Then, looking up as suddenly, to catch sight of several expressive pairs of eyes fixed in anxious intensity upon her, smiled and nodded with sweet comprehensiveness upon their fair owners, blushing suddenly conscious.

“But as I shall tell no names, except that the place was *really* Seidlitz-Pfefferingen, I am sure it

can harm no one, even though *I* tell it, who claim modestly to know everything," an assertion which caused several ladies to shudder discreetly behind their fans. "There was once a charming young girl—for all young girls are charming; it is only at my age that people must toil to make themselves attractive—as I trust I am now doing. Well, this young creature was deeply attached to a man, who, like all men, irrespective of age—to all girls, irrespective of appearance—was intensely interesting. But, if I mistake not, this young man was peculiarly interesting because of a delightful tenor voice."

A feminine chorus of "Oh's!" and "Ah's!" indicative in general as somewhat of a relief at minutial bent of the story here intervened. Smiling grimly, the Princess continued: "But there seems to have flourished in the Eden of this young girl's heart the serpent of worldly wisdom, so often discovered too late to be conveniently available of assistance. The sweet tenor, like many musical people, until they have lost their voices sufficiently to reach affluent conditions, was hardly a companion of joys, such as a rich and valiant knight promised from the depths of his bottomless purse."

"Really, Princess," interposed the Baroness von der Weide with well-bred weariness, "your story

is so conventional in stamp as hardly to merit the distinguished *empressement* you give it."

"O! my love, have patience, I beg; even you cannot foretell the end, nor, for the matter of that, the heroine either. It is one of those charming instances of incomplete disaster with which, I hear, English fiction so generously abounds."

"I pray you, Madame," began General de Luneville, sorely remindful of his own experience with the narrator, "if the story is of English extraction, allow us to read it for ourselves. The English propagate their newspapers solely for the purpose of personal romance."

"Monsieur le Générale, I would hardly, even in *my* assured position, aspire to English romance. This is only French, with English possibilities, as I intimated."

"I am sure the English are delightful," put in Princess Ostrande, eager now to avert the disaster of her own prompting.

"Doubtless *you* find them so, my dear. But to my story. This cousin of the charming voice, when bereft of his sweet idyl, instead of going on a crusade against the heathen, as he would have done under earlier conditions, performed a feat far more difficult, and dared public opinion, by going upon the stage."

"Charming, charming!" chimed in the Baron-

ess von der Weide, elaborately vivacious, sweetly regarding her ex-confidante, whose training in private theatricals now stood her good stead. "An English moral quite to the taste of Princess Ostrande. He braved public opinion and got off with a professional reputation."

"Which, strangely enough, he continues to enjoy, showing conclusively that, even in this degenerate day, *some* phases of the variety afford gratification."

"Madame, your pessimism makes one quite dismal."

"Why, Monsieur le Générale, you fill me with alarm; you still have your decorations, have you not? But how you force me to diverge from my recital! The young man, covered with glory, and, what is often more difficult for a man to sustain with discretion, *billets doux*, returned under his *nom du théâtre*, faithful to his old love, laying his heart at her feet, which, notwithstanding the fact that the remainder of her family disown all pericardic relationship, she accepted, as the etiquette books direct, with thanks."

"And they lived happily together forever after."

"That, Count, depends upon her husband's obtuseness. Do not be rash; I told you that the story was one of incomplete disaster."



CHAPTER XI.

WALDEMAR DAGGERHOF, as was so frequently his wont, arose and sallied forth in the first perfumed freshness of the day, when fog-clouds, flushing pink, rolled westward, leaving all the east a-glitter with pale blue and flashing gold. A misty, yellow glory, tangling alike in verdant crown of towering oak and dew-spangled spider-web that caught between the flowering grasses.

Behind him lay the great house, still in slumber ; below, around, a world awakening from the lullaby of night to smile a welcome at the coming day.

As he had passed the music-room, looking up involuntarily at the vine-trailed balcony, that night—now two weeks old—swept once again in full reflection across the mirror of his memory, that gave back, too, the image of bright hours between, when ceaseless fêtes prolonged the joyous freight of one glad day until another had long heralded—a gayety which thrust all thought of disagreeable import forth as sunlight cloud-wreaths ;

startling him almost in suddenness of recollection that, since immediate prompting had given such faint trace of its existence in the Countess's routine of enjoyment as to leave him almost doubtful of its actuality, and presently entirely forgetful again, as he became gradually engrossed in thought of other bent. Wandering on aimlessly, farther and farther into the tangled wild wood of the park, until the sharp, sudden detonation of a pistol jarring upon the stillness caused him to halt as suddenly and look about in alert expectancy, aroused from absent musings.

The sunshine sifted through the foliage of mighty oaks which breathed of centuries past, when summer time as gay as now had rocked them with a cradle-song of zephyrs, or, waxing in a wilder mood, still unforgot, had torn and rent with passionate might that strove to rive them from the earth's embrace.

The vines hung close; some blossoming—clematis it was—stood out in sudden flash of sunlight pale and ghostlike, gleaming from shadowy leaves and mosses intermingling. A fleecy cloud sailed in the blue deep overhead, noiseless and grandly calm, one with the life about him, no sound marring its stillness until another crashing detonation, clear and distinct, awoke faint, pealing echoes.

He advanced quickly to the brow of a rocky,

fern-fringed ledge, whence the report proceeded, and even before he reached the spot a faint plume of odorous smoke curled and broke in lazy cloudiness above it.

Below, at his feet, lay a long stretch of level sward, bounded on either side by high, moss-grown, flower-hung embankments, of which the ledge giving him lodgment formed a part. At the far end of this tree-shadowed vista, massive timbers formed a screen, now partly hung with wild convolvulus that, weaving in and out, made kindly veil to rent and fissure, gaping grimly still, betokening the *lokal* of a former *schuss-platz*. While he yet gazed, a third report fell upon his ear, and looking thitherwards through arching greenery, he saw the Countess Zàpròny advancing, trailing the length of her sombre robe along the short sward until she reached the screen, to catch, with a quick air of triumph, a tiny handkerchief from off an upright timber, examine it closely, carefully, holding aloft against the light to count the tiny circles cut in its filmy texture; then, deftly fastening it once more into place, she caught up the long, trailing drapery of her gown with a flexible sweep of one slender wrist and returned to her former position, loading the cartridge chambers to raise and fire again, again, with rapid, clicking motion as the barrels sprang in groove.

While the smoke-flowers still blossomed and hung about her face, she laughed out clear and joyously, dropping her pistol as she clapped her hands together, again advanced quickly to the tattered mark, this time to shake daringly, knowingly, the swaying mass of timbers rotted and loosed, until a slender jarring more would have brought them crushing downwards upon her, to leave unrecognizable semblance of a woman. He opened his lips to utter warning, but before the cry had left them she was returning, slowly, with head bent and hands nervously twitching, tearing into fragments the bullet-riddled fabric, tearing into shreds smaller and smaller, presently knotting them tightly together, to cast passionately from her, putting both hands before her eyes, with sudden, agonized gesture, as if to shut some mind-wrought vision from her sight.

The idea then first flashed upon him, so absorbed and rapt had been his attention, that his presence did her wrong, because unknown, and, turning on his heel, he noiselessly withdrew, filled with vague wonderment at the scene he had just witnessed. Finally dismissing all conjecture with the despatch of his café, to meet her later, fresh, bright, buoyant, as if just arisen from happiest dreams with happiest omens for the day.

“I am going to the Palace to spend an hour

with Queen Olga," she said to them, as they formed a merry group about her in the great hall, chatting and planning for a driving party shortly to be undertaken, at the same time lamenting volubly her defection. "But you know, *mes amies*, this will be my sole opportunity for a quiet talk with Her Majesty before she returns to Friedrichs Hafen, as she purposes, immediately after the ball at Wilhelma to-morrow night."

"*Mon Dieu*," interposed the Princess Bieberach, with languid, devotional gesture and sincere earnestness of tone. "My devoutest prayer is, that you may get out of one door of the Palace before the King of Holland gets in at another; his ugliness is so stupendous that nothing on earth short of a ball in his honor would induce me to go near him. Well do I remember when he came here to marry his *première amour*, the King's sister, who fainted dead away on obtaining a clear view of his face for the first time out of a miniature. *Ciel!* How that woman wanted to be a queen."

"Possibly, with no such aspirations or prospect of so lengthy a companionship in view, I shall be able to sustain a short conversation," returned the Countess, laughingly. "But after his arrival the place will hardly be in a state of repose conducive to exchange of confidences, so you may await my return without fear of disaster," and she bade

them *au revoir*, with a gay wave of her hand as the carriage turned into the long avenue of horse-chestnuts.

An avenue shortly to look down upon another roll of wheels, this time bearing forth a goodly party seeking fresh sensation under guise of studying nature, which, in other than the human variety, would have been sensation indeed, if sensation and novelty are synonymous. Waldemar, making some vague excuses as to correspondence due, failed to accompany them, preferring to quench the anxieties of distant friends by lounging under wide-spreading trees upon the terrace, to watch the cloud-massed cumuli sail, noiselessly, a gleam like great opals in the sunlight-flooded infinity of blue, falling presently into day-dreams summarily put to flight by sound of the Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim's full voice, quite near at hand.

"Not a mortal about the place, Monsieur, but the servants and the pea-fowls."

"And incidentally myself, Madame," he added, rising with politeness in his smile, and anathema in his thoughts at interruption of his luxurious loneliness.

"*Pardon* for my lack of consideration on grounds of extreme modesty. I could hardly hope that, failing to find sufficient charm in the society of your

friends to accompany them, you would be likely to afford me a welcome equal to Selkirk's, although I shall detain you but a moment," she continued, disregarding his quick deprecation, rendered more genuine at prospect of speedy release. "But I had such horrible dreams about the Countess Zàpròny last night that I drove out just as soon as those tiresome *modistes* allowed me to escape, — and now that I come to think of it, I forgot to tell them about that trimming I wish changed," she added, parenthetically and *sotto voce*.

"Madame need give herself no uneasiness on that score, I mean of the Countess Zàpròny," interposed Waldemar, smiling amusedly; taking advantage of the momentary silence into which this grievous phantom of neglect had plunged her, to continue, "I have never seen her look more bright and charming than she did this morning on departing for the Palace."

"Well, Monsieur," returned the Baroness, leaving possible mishap to Fate and the *modistes*, "my thanks for your assurances; you have relieved my mind greatly. It used to be that people called me superstitious; maybe they were right, for I would worry for hours if one of the family sneezed and I forgot to say '*Ihr wohl*,' remembering the awful fate once swift treading on neglect of the injunction. But now, why, really I feel almost wicked

sometimes in my nineteenth-century disregard of all tradition ;” an avowal which set Waldemar to smiling again as he regarded her portly, comfortable figure. “However, to return to my dreams, which, though very mixed, were sufficiently clear to fill me with absolute alarm, though you might lightly attribute them to those Strasburg *patés* at *souper* last night ; but, as I stated, I am not at all superstitious—unless I have ground for presentiment. You will excuse an old woman’s foolish anxiety on plea of fond interest in the object of it.” She began presently, after a flash of silence, and in an altered tone which caused the smile to fade gradually from his face ; “Her mother was my dearest friend, and when she was dying I promised her always to be loyal to her daughter, as I had been to her, though little did I dream that she would ever need my sympathy, or come back from all that splendor like a bird with a broken wing. Pardon me, I grow garrulous, and doubtless you will attribute that, as well as my presentiments, to age, all because of a train of thought awakened by foolish dreams. But I am actually excusable, because of late they have been so horribly, strangely persistent ; really, they quite make me shudder now in bare remembrance, though of course it is utter folly,—or the chill that this dense

shadow has given me," looking up suspiciously from the garden chair in which she was resting at the far-branching greenery above, then, presently, with more lingering satisfaction adown the sunlit avenue stretching beyond.

"Your eyes are younger than mine; is that a carriage coming up the drive?"

Gravely adjusting his glass, he announced, after careful consideration, the opinion that it was the equipage of the Countess returning, gallantly offering his arm to escort her to the terrace stair, there to await an arrival which would, at one and the same time, afford them both relief; Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim giving immediate vent to the commingled sensations of presentiment and modistical distrust that warred within her, detaining the presence and attention of the Countess until claimed by fresh-arriving guests, already welcoming, as she approached, by Count Zàpròny, who had ridden somewhat in advance of the driving party.

"But, my dear Zàpròny," Nikolas Nikisoff was saying, dropping the hand of his cousin Waldemar to return abruptly to his host, "it seems oddly strange to see you here, after leaving you, or rather your second self, gambling like a grandee of Castile down there at Monte Carlo."

"Playing at Monte Carlo? My dear fellow, you

should know better than—" he began in smiling deprecation, to cease with a start, and turn, on hearing a sudden fall immediately behind him.

It was the Countess, rigid, senseless, pale as in death, stricken prone like some stately blossom at breath of the mistral's chill.

Zàpròny caught her up tenderly in his strong arms, bearing her to a divan near at hand, summoning maids and medical assistance to her aid, bathing her temples in *eau de cologne*; strangely quiet and self-contained in contrast with the Baroness, now quite hysterical, who bent beside him, making feint of usefulness largely disproportionate with the loquacity of dismally verified prediction to which she gave free vent.

"You see, Monsieur Waldemar," in injured tearfulness, "it was not the Strasburg *paté* that made me dream such horrible things; I shall never doubt my presentiments again, — never, never." Then, with flattering self-appropriation: "It was a punishment, yes, a punishment for my disregard of sagas and traditions. I might have known it; it's what we get for imitating these anti-religionists in their wild disbelievings. She will not get well, I am quite sure; her mother died exactly in this state, unconscious, only with the pneumonia. Do you think she will ever recover?" This last to Count Zàpròny, her pre-

vious ejaculations having been to the ministering group in general, though their reception had been a silence unvarying as now.

Zàpròny, unheeded of all else, gazed with fixed agony upon the drawn, ghastly face of the Countess, now relaxing from tensity of muscle into a more natural aspect. Her lips moved slightly, then convulsively, as if to give utterance to some sudden thought flashing in returning consciousness; a shudder ran through her frame, one hand moved weakly, clutching at her throat, her eyes opened slowly, to close again. Again a shivering, this time more violent, seized upon her, to leave her breathing in long-drawn gasps like sighs of the dying. Dazed and bewildered, she stared about her, her lips giving no utterance but striving faintly to form a smile as Zàpròny's eyes looked into hers with glad, quick-springing hope. After a few sips of wine she raised, with assistance of his supporting arm, to a half-reclining posture upon the massed cushions of Turkish embroidery ladening the couch, beginning, brokenly at first, in a tone fraught with faint smiling deprecation, to regret the inopportune suddenness of her indisposition, regaining, by and by, so completely command of herself, that the physician, after springing up the stairway of the grand portal three steps at a bound, to rush quite breathless

into the salon indicated, found her chatting with a group of anxious friends, a bright smile illuminating her face — a smile reflectant in the countenances about her, but in none more brightly than Zàpròny's, as giving her his arm, they retired, close followed by the physician, who frowned, clearing his throat ominously, with a peremptory vehemence indicating full disapproval, when she nodded her *au revoirs* in gay defiance, emphasizing entire determination to be well and join them all at dinner, no matter what injunctions and fiats might intervene; her face, in its rapid transfiguration, becoming remindful of that night upon the balcony and the quick, desperate change her will had wrought in masking its portrayals. What could be wrong? What lay amiss? Dimly his uncle's words came to him as they told the Countess's history on that stormy Christmas Eve before a glowing grate at Hotel Marquardt. "The strangest part of the story is, that de Tocqueville and Zàpròny are so strikingly alike in appearance, carriage, and bearing." Could it be? But pshaw! to what lengths would this insatiable passion for vivisection of emotional effect not lead. To wrong, even in thought, a woman beautiful in being and in deed as the Countess Zàpròny, was unworthy his heart and honor as a gentleman. It was but natural that nerves, overwrought to

fullest tensity of development by weight of woe which seared with desecrating frost the first fruits of her heart, should leave imprint that sometimes a faint reminder brought ruthlessly in full relief from out those dim recesses whence the light and joy of her glad present had well-nigh banished them.

At dinner, this refutation of his calmer, more practical self acquired fresh and decisive confirmation. Nikolas Nikisoff it was, too, who brought to bear upon the acute impression of the circumstance. The Countess was again with them, grandly, calmly beautiful, clad in a rich gown of flame brocade which lent fictitious flush to a face serene, unclouded, repelling with ready smile even remote allusion to an emotion past, to be, apparently, as suddenly forgot as its awakening.

They were seating at the long table decked with waxen lights that stood, phalanx of mellow glare, between chased golden bowls, freighted with luscious roses; and lifting a single bud from beside his Sèvres plate, Nikisoff, contemplating for a moment its beauty reflectively, pinned it upon the lapel of his coat, remarking meanwhile to Zàpròny:—

“Your roses are rare. Doubtless your passion for them is equal to my own, judging from the

minute study which I saw you bestowing upon them just now, out on the terrace."

"My dear fellow! Your faculty for interchanging personal presentment is wonderful. Twice to-day you have flattered me with some one else's anatomy."

"But, Count, I positively thought I saw you, just at nightfall, on the wing of the terrace overlooking the precipice."

"No; it was an optical delusion; some one, gifted with my corporeal reflection, has been imposing himself upon your vision. The only mission that I undertake in the *rosen garten* is to gather Madame's favorite *gloires de Dijon*, and, as she is not wearing them to-night, my horticultural innocence is fully proven." And he laughed a little at his friend's repeated mistake, as he singled a *gloire de Dijon* from the bowl before him to catch it lightly in his coat lapel, bowing with a smile, betokening rare remembrance, to the Countess.

"I have never been accused of near-sightedness," returned Nikisoff, in a tone tinged faintly with resentment, which disappeared as he proceeded. "Indeed, in the Turco affair I was considered one of the best fellows in the regiment for *reconnaissance*. But *n'importe*. I am reminded though—" and he plunged into a war episode

hinging on mistaken identity ; an episode which caused this little *contretemps* to fade in dramatic intensity of its recital, even to the quick sense and tentative imagination of Daggerhof, who had just now, with veiled glance, sought for some answering trace of emotion in the Countess's face at repetition of a theme to which he had attributed the prompting of her late agitation. But no ; the only change of expression that her calm, pale countenance depicted was a sudden springing flame of wrath, white, fixed, and intense ; for one short instant it gleamed, to be quick followed by contempt that left her to subside again into her former attitude of interest in Prince Daggerhof's ambling, sunny conversation, from which acute sense of hearing had for a passing moment claimed her, shivering a little presently, but only because of a sudden gust of air that, rushing in through deep French windows, now closed by watchful attendants, flared the candles into mellow, fan-like glow. He was correct ; the look which had sprung to her face was one of wrathful contempt at her own weakness, and determinate self-command to crush out remotest semblance of repetition. He had attributed to her nerves, as actualities, mere memories jarring to painful emotion with their awakening. And there dismissed with a smile that relegated to mistaken idea

the vain bent of his ponderings, devoting himself, with those about him, to the gay progression of the *dîner*, which finally, after the English fashion, found the men alone over their wine, as Countess Natalie gave the signal for retiring.

She had skilfully managed to direct the grouping of the ladies at that end of the *grande salon* farthest from the terrace, to leave them, after a little, absorbed in gay chatter, which mingled with the tones of a Hungarian rhapsodie, rich in mighty chords, swept forth in full undulation from the Blüthner grand piano, awakening responsive to the fingers of Princess Ostrande. For an instant the Countess stood at the low window in full glow of the white light which streamed upon her, calm and stately, in a pose of perfect self-possession and indifference, until the crushing of fresh-fallen twigs on the terrace told of a result evidently awaited; for without rebating her demeanor, she slowly crossed the balcony, descending the stairway, to advance with slightly hastened steps toward a fountain noisily dripping beneath a half-arborescent embrasure, where the tall figure of a man rose in indistinct silhouette, a blacker shadow than those encircling it. As she approached, he had made a step forward, letting the light gleam full upon him, then drew backward.

"What do you wish?" she said, with acme of equanimity and calm, so widely different from the startled imprecation which he had hoped for and awaited, as to sweep him entirely off his guard, for an instant leaving him absent of expression. "What do I wish?" he repeated directly, with slow gathering insult in the tone, "I wish more than the beggarly amount with which you befooled me two weeks ago."

"Indeed!" she answered, "you quite fill me with surprise. Many would have deemed a present, not altogether voluntary, of papers which relegated them to their proper sphere, all-sufficient; you must deem me a very pitiful dupe to be ever so responsive to your askings. But I have no time for parley. Detention here compromises me. I must be going."

"Going!" he said, savagely, drawing her suddenly towards him as she had turned with feint of leaving. "Going! Not until I am ready, Madame. Compromise you! You afford me more amusement than I had awaited. You stand in an odd predicament, filled with a righteous virtue lest the presence of your lawful, loving spouse should compromise you."

"I have neither time, nor desire to speak at length with you," she said, wrenching herself free from his grasp, grown lax because of her resist-

lessness. "Name your terms, then I will consider compliance."

"You will consider. Well, *I* have considered. Nothing short of double the amount you gave me at our last meeting will tempt me to release revenge."

"Indeed!" with indifferent contempt. "You wish to revisit Monte Carlo?"

"Who told you of my presence there?"

"I was fully posted as to your movements. That is sufficient. As for the money, I have not got it, nor would I give it if I had."

"You *will* not! Then come!" he cried in vehement rage, throwing his powerful arm suddenly about her waist and dragging her violently forward until their steps had touched the outermost verge of shadow. Already the clear voices of the ladies conversing in the *grande salon* fell distinct upon her ear. A long sighing cadenza swept in minor tone from out the light. A shriek was stifled back upon her lips with effort that left her shivering, powerless, almost lifeless, until her head sank down upon his breast. The contact seemed to bear life out of her loathing.

"I will . . . I will . . ." she gasped with difficulty, staggering backwards toward the fountain and the shadow. "I will . . . *Grand Dieu!* . . . are you a fiend?"

"I am a man in need of money," he replied with smiling malevolence. "Only another definition of the term, but more polite; and I would advise you, as a friend, to make use of it. When will you give me the money?"

"Oh! I do not know . . I do not know . ." she panted, bereft for a moment of all power of thought at recking of disaster, averted, maybe, for a little space hardly worth its dalliance.

"Hasten! you compromise me," he mocked, in scornful malevolence.

"Oh! can it be! can it be! Must I sacrifice my mother's jewels?" she ejaculated pitifully, scarce above her breath. The words choked, inarticulate, because of dry sobs racking her, a shivering creeping afresh upon her. Then, with one of those rare transitions in which her strength seemed always drawn from some sudden inspiration holding definite defence, she asked in a tone steadied to careful modulation: "Do you know the grounds?"

"You have afforded me ample opportunity to study them."

"To-morrow night, at eleven o'clock, I will meet you at the old *schuss-platz*, to left of the avenue, next to the river." A simple declaration that, given, left her almost powerless to restrain emotion so intense as to cause her to sink upon a

bench, unable longer to stand upright because of violent tremblings which racked her.

"Ah!" he said grimly, "play your part better than that. You want to have an end put to me and your anxieties — denial is useless. I am hardly the fool you hope me. I will meet you to-morrow night, as before, by the window leading upon the terrace. Whose voice is that?" as the one word "Natalushka!" swept clear, distinct, to their hearing.

"*Dio mio!* Let me go!"

"Natalushka! Natalushka!" came again.

"Ah! your fond husband. Wait. I will not let you go until we have full understanding."

"I will! Oh! anything — yes! yes!"

"Natalushka!"

"I am coming," she cried, as footsteps echoed on the balcony stair.

He freed her then, to stagger towards a rose-tree, catching eagerly at the flower-trailing branches, tearing her hands, all unmindful of the piercing thorns, as she held aloft a rich-hued cluster before Zàpròny's light-dazzled vision; while he chided her for her imprudence in braving the night's dew in such light quest, when a score of hands would gladly serve her bidding.

This, almost in hearing of Narcisse de Tocqueville's laughing derision.



CHAPTER XII.

THE air was sifting lazily through silken hangings that shrouded to mellow light Zàpròny's study. The hour was nearing sunset. Beyond, in the Park, a dazzling radiance floated in the air, bringing into clear relief myriads of butterflies and insects darting and whirling in a web of motion against the golden mist which stretched to meet the dim, cool shadows of the forest.

Within, the stillness was broken by a soft *frou frou* of skirts, and Countess Natalie had just seated herself in a low bamboo chair, to sigh wearily, then quickly change the cadence of her mood to smiles, as the Count entered, accompanied by Waldemar, to whom he was saying, while they lingered for a moment upon the threshold, "The weapons are curious, but hardly beautiful; they breathe too clearly of murders they have wrought on lonely steppes, though with me taste is doubtless biased by knowledge of their history. You may find — Ah! Madame, welcome. Where have

you fled since *déjeuner* to evade us so successfully? I have instituted a regular campaign in your pursuit."

"Where have I not been," she ejaculated, smiling comprehensively upon them both, and letting fall into her lap, with little gesture of despair, the hand Zàpròny had pressed lightly to his lips.

"From your eloquent manner, Madame," interposed Waldemar, with smiling promptitude, "I should say that you had been either calling or shopping."

"I have, Monsieur, a high appreciation of your power of acute observation, which makes itself not only visible, but felt," she returned with equal pleasantry; though there was, to his quick ear, an intonation that sent the blood surging guiltily, to fade as quickly as the tone had done. "I have been doing both. You see, as usual, you are correct. Now, never say you failed to find ingenuousness a virtue sometimes attributable to woman. Yes, I know you would deprecate the pessimism. So should I, if I did not understand my sex. But to begin with the pleasantest, not at all savoring of despair, my visit was to the Baroness von Pappenheim-Waggenheim, whose domicile I discovered all confusion and *modistes* — though pray do not imagine my interest centred in that fact," she averred laughingly, "but rather the 'contract-

ing figures,' as Princess Bieberach just now denominated them. What happiness the future depicts in their bright faces! Life holds for them so much; it looks so fair and promises so many years of joy." Her last phrases spoken almost in thought, a mezzo-tone of lingering sadness creeping upon the bright *crescendo* with which her words began, to leave her silent, looking with misty eyes across the golden flood sweeping the landscape.

Zàpròny had come quickly to her side, always alive to every shading of her mood; and taking both her hands in his had pressed them softly, standing thus, for a moment, with his heart reflected in his eyes, bent lovingly on hers.

"Ah! Daggerhof, the pistols. Madame, as usual, has put thought of aught else from my mind. Here they are," advancing in broad strides towards an antique cabinet. "Examine them before the daylight grows too late; they are much better studied so." Handing from out the depths with ready mien, betokening perfect knowledge, two long, slender-barrelled pistols, their gleamings chased in intertwining sprays and arabesques as sinuous as the vexed knots their smoke-flecked throats had flashed asunder, erasing in a breath all might of obstacle.

Waldemar, taking them with a curiosity tem-

pered almost to superstition, because of the history they held, crossed to the fast-fading light to clearer study their prompt, death-dealing mechanism. Then, abruptly turning, he approached the Countess, saying, "Madame, have you ever noted the lightness, the insignificance that may quench a mighty purpose? Feel the small weight of this quaint weapon."

To his surprise, the greater because of what he yesterday had witnessed in that secluded corner of the Park, she put both hands before her eyes with a sudden gesture strongly remindful of that abandon of despair so poignantly awakened yesterday in her fancied solitude, a genuine horror finding vent in her tone, as, recoiling, she exclaimed: "No, no, Monsieur! I cannot. Take them away." Then, looking up suddenly to discover an expression of puzzled surprise dominant in his face, a smile played about her mouth. A smile apparently aroused by that same puzzled gaze, for, laughing softly, though a cloud still shadowed on her brow, she said, as he turned to do her bidding: "Well, as you will. Give them to me; I will show you how brave I am." And holding them for an instant, shivering as the steel touched her *gants de Suède*, gave them back again; starting slightly at the moment as Nikolas Nikisoff's merry voice sounded from beneath

the portière, challenging his cousin to a game of *billard* before dinner, in a tone of animation which recalled Zàpròny from the window, whence he had taken another treasure for examination.

Then, being alone with the Count in the soft twilight, she clasped both hands about his arm, drawing him slowly across the shadowed parquet until they stood together in the deep embrasured balcony, her head resting for an instant lightly upon his shoulder, as the fresh wind, loosed from the meshes of a sun-wove day, scattered its treasured perfumes in gay wantonness about them.

"Do you find the air chill?" he asked, in ever-ready solicitude, as a brief tremor shook her nervously.

"Cold, cold?" she queried vacantly, as if the sensation ascribed by him was farthest from her thoughts. "No; why do you ask?" averting her face from his quick glance, which, in the one brief instant accorded it, had noted the pallor resting there; and, putting one hand softly upon her cheek, started to find it moist with tears.

"Natalushka, Natalushka, you are ill! You are overtaxing your strength. I am glad, thankful beyond expression that this ball at Wilhelma ends it all and we shall soon be once more alone again," lingering with prolonged tenderness, bereft of deep concern just now conveyed, upon the words "alone again."

“Are you happy, then, with only me? Do you think that you could live on and on, through all the years allotted to our span with only Natalushka? That if some dreadful woe swept on me, barring me from society, you could find joy as you now fancy, centering all in all with me? Look into your heart and see.”

Her sentences had been pronounced with a quick abruptness of delivery, as if with difficulty the deep emotion prompting them was held in check. Then, laughing with a chill, forced unnaturalness, which, from the pained expression in his face, wounded deeper than her tears, proceeded nervously, disregarding his quick, impetuous assurances as he gathered her closely in his arms : —

“No, no, do not answer me. You shall never be called upon for such grave test. Never! never!” with increasing, passionate eagerness which sought confirmation in its own earnestness. “We will live on and on together, in this bright, beautiful world, until, like those butterflies I chose our counterparts that day upon the terrace, our sense of existence flutters out together into a great infinity, which can hold no torture mightier than a separation here, no bliss beyond our union.” Throwing her arms passionately about his neck, she drew his dark, handsome face down close to hers, kiss-

ing him again and again. "There, there; this foolish weakness is past. I am strong, quite strong now; we shall never, never be separated, but, like the butterflies, one, even in death." A grand positiveness ringing in her tone, triumphant in its certainty. A positiveness that seemed to resolve itself into the fixed contour of her face, in which a mighty purpose sat enthroned with powerful intent that gave it majesty and peace, as, some hours later, she softly raised the portière veiling the door of Count Zàpròny's dressing-room to let it fall again, apparently satisfied on hearing his quick, firm steps echo faintly through the portal.

Hastening, without loss of a second's space, down the long stairway ablaze with mellow lights, her sombre robe gliding in noiseless rhythm with her hurried footfall; starting suddenly and putting both hands to her heart as a quick, sharp voice sounded close in her ear: "Ah! my dear. Forgive me, I frightened you in my thoughtlessness, but I wanted you to see how well I look."

"*Charmante, Madame, charmante.* I have always remarked that mauve is particularly becoming to you," was the answer, given quickly and in a tone that veiled with marked endeavor a desire for immediate release.

"But *ciel*, child. You are not going to wear

that black thing? Though being both a pretty woman and a rich one, you might paint yourself in stripes and be quite the rage; except that, on the whole, I rather think the stripes would create more genuine impression."

"I have not made my toilette yet, Madame; indeed I rather think it *will* create a small sensation when I do, but hardly equal to the one you picture."

"Then fly, hasten. It is already terribly late, and if it were I, why, I should not get there before morning. I had Jeanette begin to do me up two hours and a half ago; now, as she has just finished, I intend taking a little well-earned rest before departing. Here comes Count de Tocqueville; he may keep me awake until a sight of the King of Holland frightens me out of closing my eyes for a month."

But, seldomwise, Count de Tocqueville seemed loth to linger, excusing himself under pretext of escorting Natalie to her apartments that the all-important event of her toilette might be delayed no longer.

Already the clock in the courtyard had tolled forth the quarter before eleven, but still he delayed, saying that he wished to speak with her, though remaining silent until, following his bent, they had reached the end of the great corridor

and stood alone—the house wrapped in a stillness equal to that preceding dawn.

“Natalie! Natalie! what is it? what does all this mean? I have sought in vain to see you alone since last night at dinner,” he pleaded, his breath coming short and irregular, both hands clutching his heart as if to steady its beatings sufficiently to bear the tidings he felt her ready to pronounce.

“I am at a loss to know the import of your words,” she answered, a startled light flashing into her tawny eyes, to veil again when she felt his upon her.

“Oh! you know what I mean—those strange resemblances. I heard it all last night at dinner. I heard Nikisoff's words; heard of your sudden indisposition; saw the agony creep into your face. There it is now, it has never left it! My God! tell me, is he escaped—or—sane?” And he sank against the casement, great drops of sweat dripping from his brow, while she caught and supported him, closing her eyes and shutting close her lips for one brief instant, then began in a tone, soothing, allaying, as of one assuaging the frightened grief of a child.

“To what excess do you let this foolish idea lead you? Your life is too much to me, who hold you so dear, to have you risk it thus. Dismiss this

foolish fancy from your brain ; he is safe. Keep well, grow strong again, against the coming of a day when I may need you more than to defend me from an idle fantasy."

While she thus calmly reasoned, one hand, left free from weight of his support, clutched at her draperies nervously, convulsively, until she saw his eyelids faintly flutter, then open, wearily.

"Ah! I am foolish," he began weakly, "very foolish. I might not be so if I were my old self ; this trouble has made me less a man : or, maybe, it is my great desire to save you from all harm, to stand between yourself and ill, that makes me so."

"You have no need to do aught else than grow better. That I crave to see more now than anything. I am so happy, life holds everything for me. No woman could wish for, dream of more. So rest content." And stooping, she kissed him lightly upon the forehead, an occurrence with her, being little given to such token of affection, rarely unusual. Then exclaimed in startled tone, in which affright had strong predominance, hardly accordant with the import of her words :—

"There is eleven o'clock ! I must be going. I have not made my toilette."

But he detained her yet some moments longer, lingering still upon the landing even after she had closed her door to open presently with wary cau-

tion and peer from between the heavy portières. Watching his uncertain loiterings wild with suppressed haste and excitement until, at last, he slowly passed her veiled concealment, smiling softly to himself in quiet content.

Drawing her breath quickly, pantingly, as she gathered her draperies closely about her, she sped on, on through unfrequented corridors, pausing now and then in stifled breathlessness to look about her with the air of one pursued, starting at shadows, repressing a scream when a great curtain flapped in the wind ; but always clasping one hand closely to the bosom of her dress upon something held as treasure there.

She had reached the door of Prince Eugene's suite. Noisily, more noisily than it had ever sounded, creaked the door upon its hinges. Startled, she looked about her, pulling it shut again very slowly, warily, to avoid all sound as it swayed heavily in place.

The moonlight flooded the vast apartment, making silver arabesque upon antique furniture and sombre draperies, which stood out in massive folds, as if carved in stone.

Softly she crept across the floor, breathing quickly, flutteringly, as if the damp cold air of the long-closed rooms choked in her throat. A quarter past eleven boomed forth in one long, rever-

berating stroke that sounded like a knell, to make her break forth afresh in shivering ; the casement swung back slowly, and she started with sudden wariness, scarcely breathing, as there, beyond, distinct in the moonlight, clear outlined against the star-swung sky, against the fog-wreaths coiling white and ghostly from out the valley, rose the silhouette of a man, poised swayingly without the terrace railing, one hand grasping the balustrade, the other despoiling the *gloires de Dijon* of all their beauty as one branch after another was tossed recklessly upon the pavement.

Now was a chance to give her freedom, life, joy, undisturbed and peaceful while the heart-beats told. Life, with all her soul held dear, that made her life itself.

One word escaped her, that one word "Narcisse !"

The night-wind must have borne its burden to his ear, for he bent upwards, as if about to look upon her ; but quicker still, before his eyes had lifted to the light, her hand grasped at her bosom, a gleam of steel, a faint glare, a thread of fire flashing outwards.

The hand loosed its hold upon the railing. Both arms flung wildly above his head and the figure swayed outwards, plunging suddenly into the abyss below, rock-gorged, foam-swept, that pierced

aloft huge juts and spars like dragon's teeth, to mar all trace of recognition from a being cast into its black depths.

A smile triumphant, beaming, glittered in her eyes with mighty joy, as she moved a step in shadow to toss the pistol, a ray of swerving light, far out across the terrace into yawning gloom.

But as she fled across the threshold a wild cry trembled on the great stillness. There, before her, laughing with a chill joy all familiar to the monks of San Juan de Rez, his former keepers, stood Narcisse de Tocqueville, still laughing, with peal on peal of mocking laughter, as she fell prone at his feet above a dark shadow deeper than those hovering mistily over it, bathed in the moonlight.

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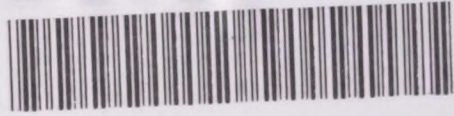
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